
THE CAMP AT SEA DUCK COVE




ELLERY H. CLARK

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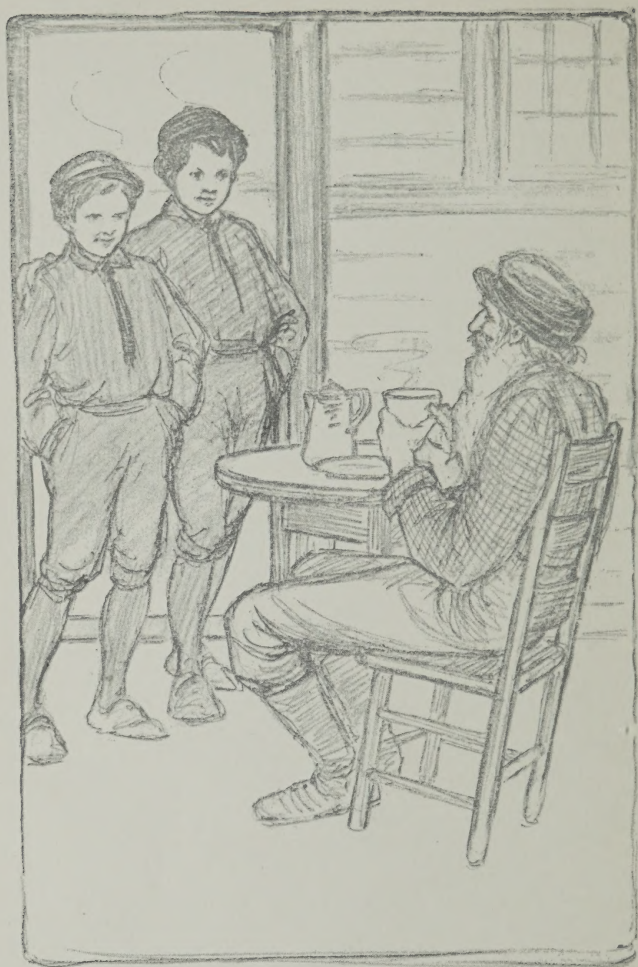
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By Ellery B. Clark

THE CAMP AT SEA DUCK COVE. Illustrated.
REMINISCENCES OF AN ATHLETE. Illustrated.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

The Camp at Sea Duck Cove



WELL, WELL, GLAD TO SEE YE (p. 49)

THE CAMP AT SEA DUCK COVE

BY
ELLERY H. CLARK

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
LUCY FITCH PERKINS



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THE BLUE WALL



RICHARD WASHBURN CHILD

ROBERT PHILLIPS

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THE CAMP AT SEA DUCK COVE

CHAPTER I

DICK RANDALL GOES FOR THE MAIL

THE August night was one of stifling heat. Dick Randall stood at the window of the living-room, in the Randall farmhouse, staring out into the darkness, his forehead knotted, his eyes perplexed, as though he were trying to solve a difficult problem. Across the silence of the clear, starlit night, there came sharply to his ears the myriad noises of the outdoor world — the chirping of the crickets, the droning of the locusts; far away, beyond the road, the distant calling of the whip-poor-wills. In the east, the full moon, large and round, mounted higher and higher above the fields. There was no faintest sign of rain; the long drought remained unbroken.

At the table, in the centre of the room, sat Dick's father and mother. Mrs. Randall, cheerful, energetic, always at work, was busied with

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her knitting. Dick's father, huge and gaunt of frame, his massive shoulders bent with toil, his hair and beard streaked with grey, presently laid aside his paper, and leaning back in his chair, passed his hand across his tired eyes, and half unconsciously sighed. At the sound, Dick turned quickly from the window.

"What's the weather prediction, father?" he asked; "any rain in sight?"

Mr. Randall shook his head. "No, Dick," he answered; "no such luck. Fair and warm, it says, all over the country. Not a sign of a storm anywhere; no prospect of showers even. Though, to tell the truth, it doesn't make much difference now; the crop's past saving. It will be one of the worst years we ever had."

Dick's face was troubled. "But prices are good, aren't they?" he hazarded. "I heard them saying at the store the other night that they needed wheat abroad, and that there was a big demand at home, besides. If the price is high enough, won't that make up for a poor crop?"

Mr. Randall shook his head once more. "Not this year, Dick," he answered; "they can put prices up to the sky, if they want to, but

Dick Randall goes for the Mail

if you've nothing to bring to market, what good does it do? The crop's a failure already; it won't be a half of what it ought to be. I like to look on the bright side of things, whenever I can, but this time there is n't any bright side. It's a hard chance, and no mistake."

"Yes," Dick assented, "I suppose it is. I'm awfully sorry, father; I wish there was something I could do. I feel as if I was n't much use to you this summer; I'm not worth my board and keep. It's too bad."

"Oh, don't worry about that," answered Mr. Randall; "it's not your fault. Only I'm sorry for the school part of it, Dick. That's what troubles us more than anything else, is n't it, mother?" and he turned toward his wife.

Mrs. Randall glanced up from her work, letting her knitting fall, as she looked across the room at her boy. "Yes, indeed," she answered, "we can get along. But we did want to send you back to the Academy for another year, Dick, and then have you go to college. And now that you've passed your first examinations so well, it seems a shame. But I don't see how we can do it. You understand

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how it is, my son; you know we would, if we could."

Her tone was so anxious and so kind that Dick turned back to the window for a moment, to hide a suspicious moisture that came creeping into the corners of his eyes. And then, although ordinarily not a particularly demonstrative boy, he crossed the room, bent over his mother's chair, and kissed her.

"Don't you bother your heads about me for a minute," he declared. "I've been lucky to have had one good year at Fenton, anyway. I'll never forget it. And to go back for another, and then to go to college — why, that would have been almost too much. I had no right to expect it. But I'm awfully sorry about the crops. There's so little to do, now, around the farm. I feel as if I ought to be out, hustling for a job —"

His father interrupted him. "No, no," he said; "you mustn't take this too seriously, Dick. It's not as bad as all that. It's a poor year, of course, — an exceptionally poor year, — there's no denying it. But we'll have good ones, later, to pay for it; we're not going bankrupt yet awhile. Only as far as expenses

Dick Randall goes for the Mail

go, we shall have to be careful for this year. If you could only find some way to make a little money yourself, Dick, I should think, by another fall, I could manage to help you again. But it's a hard time for every one — jobs are scarce. And you say, at the Museum, you could n't come to terms?"

Dick shook his head. "No," he answered, "we could n't seem to fix it. You see, old man Ruggles left just so much money to the town; part of it to build the Museum, part to stock it; and when it came to the matter of the bird collecting, I thought I might have a show, because I really know quite a little about that sort of thing, and I can put up a skin, or mount a bird, by this time, in pretty fair style. And they did n't dispute it; they treated me first-class all the way through. They even said they would be glad to have me do the collecting for them, and would pay me a fair price for every skin they could use. But the trouble came on the question of travelling expenses. It seems that the Museum cost more than they thought it would, and as a result they have n't the money to look after the collections in just the style that old Ruggles meant them to.

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I think if they would allow me my expenses, it would be a scheme worth trying, but they say they can't, and so I don't really believe it would pay. I guess I'll have to put in my surplus energy on the farm. I wish there was more work to do; I feel as strong as a horse, after all the training I had at school."

His father looked up at him with satisfaction in his eye. And indeed no father in the country need have felt ashamed to own Dick as a son. His features were clean-cut and manly, his expression good-humored, yet determined; and his whole build — strong and sturdy, but with no lack of speed and spring — showed a physical development far above the average. He looked back at his father with an answering smile.

"Well," he said, "I guess I'll walk down to the post-office, and get the mail. It's too hot to stay indoors to-night, anyway. And don't you think I care a hang about going back to school, because I don't. I'm happy anywhere."

He tried to speak cheerfully, and as if he meant every word he said, but when the door had closed behind him, and he had started down the winding road on his journey toward

Dick Randall goes for the Mail

the village, he found that to keep up his courage was no easy task. Unconsciously his usual springy gait relaxed, and he plodded slowly along, deep in thought. For the first time he realized what a disappointment the loss of the school year would really be. For one thing, there were his studies. Even before he had gone to Fenton, he had developed a strong taste for zoölogy and the natural sciences, and his work at the Academy had strengthened his determination to make these subjects his specialty during his college term. He had even gone so far, in secret, as to search the catalogues through and through, pausing over the courses which attracted him, like an epicure studying some tempting bill of fare. And now, not only must all this be given up, but there would be the loss of his friends as well. Harry Allen, of course, would have graduated, and Ned Brewster likewise, but Jim Putman and Steve Lindsay would be back, and plenty of other fellows besides. Then there was the loss of Mr. Fenton himself — Dick had become genuinely attached to the master, with his high ideals of sport and scholarship, and his quiet, unobtrusive way of making his in-

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fluence felt. And lastly, he must give up his beloved athletics, and with them the chance of being elected captain of the track team for the ensuing year. Altogether, the sudden change of plan was far from alluring. It was not that he objected to working on the farm, — if he could have helped his father and mother by doing so, he would have considered it the only thing to do, — but it was the idea of working without prospect of success which did not appeal to him. "Look at my father," he reflected to himself, "he inherited the house, and the land, and the mortgage, and he's worked like a slave all his life, without ever taking time for anything else, and now he's just about where he was when he started. Farming may be all right, in lots of places, but it does n't seem to pay around here."

Thus he walked slowly on toward the village, still thinking hard, but finding so little in his thoughts to cheer him that presently, in a sudden burst of self-disgust, he began to vent his dissatisfaction on himself. "You're a good one, you are," he said accusingly; "you were beginning to think, back there at Fenton, that you were quite a chap, because you could

Dick Randall goes for the Mail

jump a little, and won a point or two for the school. But now you're home, you're pretty small potatoes; that's what you are. You're just plain unskilled labor — that's all — and labor's mighty cheap, these days. They're not giving any medals for that."

He shook his head dejectedly as he strode along. Even the beauty of the summer night failed to rouse him from his mood, for the great, broad fields, stretching away so endlessly on every hand, made the world suddenly seem larger to him than it had ever done before, and he himself — a tiny pinpoint on the long, winding ribbon of quiet road — appeared to shrink, by comparison, into complete and utter insignificance. "You're a great chap, you are," he repeated once more, and hurriedly quickened his pace, as if striving to leave his gloomy thoughts behind.

Halfway to the village he passed the only house on the solitary road — the home of Abe Andrews, his father's oldest friend.

From the front porch, Andrews hailed him, "That you, Dick?"

Dick, in his present mood, felt no great desire for company, yet he would not have

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hurt the old man's feelings for the world, and so called back cheerfully, "Yes, sir, this is Dick. Anything I can do for you, Mr. Andrews?"

"You jest wait a minute," came the reply, "an' I'll go 'long with you. I'm goin' to get my mail. That is, if you don't mind slowin' up a little mite for an old feller like me."

"Not a bit," Dick answered; "glad to have you come. Don't hurry; I'll wait." And a moment later they were walking on together, Dick accommodating his long strides to the old man's shuffling, halting steps.

At once the conversation turned to the one topic always in season — the condition of the crops. "Bad year, Mr. Andrews," Dick observed. "Father says even rain would n't help much now. As bad a year, I guess, as we ever had."

His companion did not immediately reply, though if any man in the world would have been justified in complaining, it seemed that Andrews was the man. Unlucky in everything, from his boyhood to his old age, his name had become a byword among his neighbors, standing for steady and unchanging misfor-

Dick Randall goes for the Mail

tune. "Lucky — like Abe Andrews," was a common phrase throughout the township. And yet, curiously enough, the old man himself never whimpered. Brought up by his parents to look upon the Bible as the one sure guide in an uncertain world, he had a text for every mishap, and in spite of his seventy years of uphill fighting, he was still cheerful and courageous, maintaining that some day his luck was going to turn, and that everything would come right to him at last.

So now he did not assent to Dick's statement. "Well, no," he answered slowly, "I wouldn't say that, exactly, Dick. It ain't such an awful *good* year, of course; but still there's been worse ones. Why, I remember one spell, away back in the eighties, when it was somethin' terrible. No one raised anythin' that year; ground was burned to a cinder. Never see such weather in my life, 'fore or since. No, this year ain't a great year; of course you could n't say that; but still, it ain't so terrible bad. We'll do a little somethin', 'fore we're through, an' prices are goin' to be high. Dollar wheat, they're talkin', down t' the store."

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Dick felt himself at a loss for a reply. Before such inveterate optimism as this, there seemed no use in argument. "Oh, yes, it might be worse," he answered; "that is, a little. Though I can't think of anything short of an earthquake that would do much damage now. It's pretty tough on every one. It's a shame."

The unusual discontent in his tone seemed to strike the old man, and presently he observed, "Your dad was tellin' me, t' other day, he reckoned he could n't send you back to school. That right, Dick?"

Dick nodded. "Yes, that's right," he answered, "but I don't mind. I'd just as lieves stay at home."

The old man did not contradict him. Mr. Randall had told him the whole story; he sympathized with Dick's misfortune, and liked the manner in which he faced it. "No," he said gently, "you don't mind, of course. I know how young fellers feel, when they're about as old as you be. You don't care nothin' about goin' back to school at all."

There was something so kindly in the old man's tone, and it conveyed his meaning so

Dick Randall goes for the Mail

well, that, whereas Dick would have held out stoutly against argument, he now promptly capitulated. "Well," he confessed, "I did n't mean that, exactly. I mean that I don't care, with things the way they are now. But if we had a better crop, and my father could afford it, why, then I'd like to go back. Because it's a good thing to learn all you can. And Fenton is a mighty fine school, Mr. Andrews; I had a great time there last year."

The old man nodded. "I don't doubt it for a minute," he answered, "and I was sorry when I heard your father could n't fix it so's to send you back. But don't you go to worryin', Dick; it'll all come right. If you ain't meant to go back, you ain't *meant*; that's all there is about that."

Dick shrugged his shoulders a trifle rebelliously, for the philosophy of a man of seventy does not come easily to a boy of seventeen.

Presently the old man added. "But I believe, Dick, somehow or 'nother, you're goin' back to school. I got a great idee that if a feller only wants a thing bad enough, he's mighty apt to get it 'fore he's through. He

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may have to work terrible hard to do it, but if he only sticks, and don't get discouraged, an' does his bang-slap-up, best he knows how, — just about his *durndest*, as you might say, — he's awful apt to get there. Of course, sometimes" — he paused a moment, and Dick felt that he must be thinking of his own hard fight, and the ill-luck which had followed him — then added, as cheerfully as ever, — "sometimes, of course, a feller doesn't hit it, even when he's tried what seems to him pretty good and hard; an' those are the times where, as I'm tellin' you, it ain't *meant*. There's somethin' about it, Dick, that we don't understand; but we'll know some day; leastways, that's *my* belief."

Dick nodded. The old man spoke so kindly and so sincerely that it was hard to listen to him without being impressed by what he said. "Well, maybe you're right," he answered, "I'm not saying that you're not. But I don't believe you're right about my going back to school. I'd try, hard enough, if there was a show, but I can't see where I'm going to find it. Making money is an awfully hard trick this year."

Dick Randall goes for the Mail

As he spoke, they came in sight of the post-office, and Dick half smiled, half frowned to himself at the familiarity of the whole scene. The same listless figures sprawled on the steps; the same big brown dog, of uncertain parentage, lay prone in the dust beside them; from further down the street a phonograph creaked and groaned. The heat seemed even more stifling than ever; the whole atmosphere of the town was hopeless, discouraged, played-out.

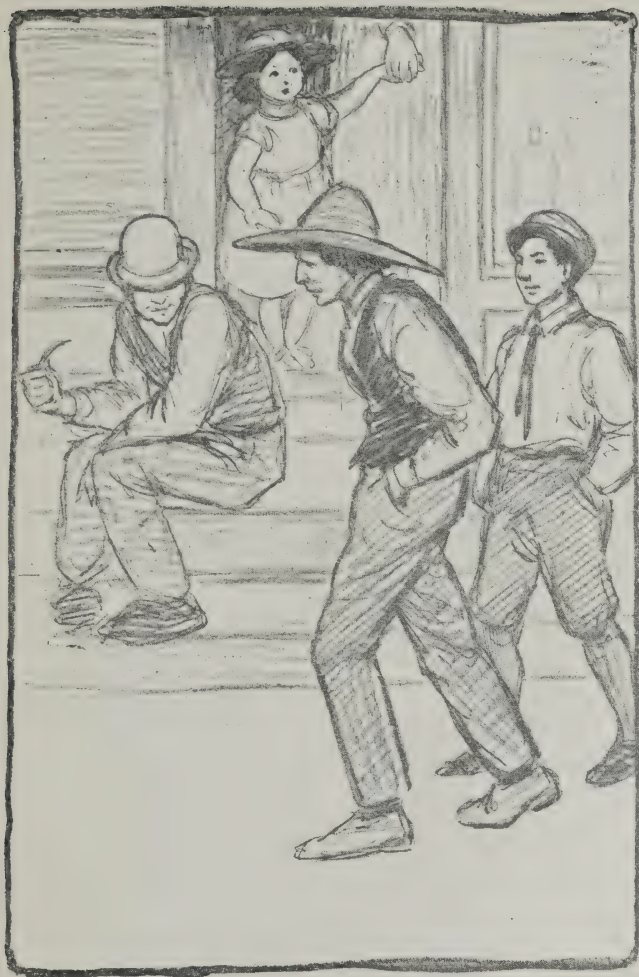
Exchanging greetings with their friends, they entered the office, and Dick, casting an eye on his father's box, noticed that it was unusually full. When the letters were handed to him, however, his interest quickly declined. Glancing hastily through the pile, he saw that they were a miscellaneous collection of circulars, advertisements, with one or two unwelcome bills. And then, suddenly, at the bottom of the heap, he came on two letters addressed to himself. The handwriting on the first seemed vaguely familiar, but it was not until he had examined the second, with its typewritten address, and in the corner, "Allen and Company; Bankers and Brokers," that he realized who his correspondents were. "Harry

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Allen!" he exclaimed to himself; "well, now, that's queer. I thought he was abroad. A letter from him, and one from his father. I wonder what they've got to say."

He walked over to a quiet corner of the post-office and hastily read the letters through. By the time he had finished, his expression had completely changed, and an instant later he had started for the door at a pace midway between a walk and a run. Old man Andrews, observing him, called out: "Hold on a minute, Dick; I'll go back with you," but Randall was too impatient to wait. "Sorry, Mr. Andrews," he flung back over his shoulder, — "in a hurry — got to get home." And in a twinkling he was in the street, and in spite of the warmth of the evening was starting off, at a quick jog, up the road.

Ten minutes later he burst into the house, flushed, panting, dishevelled, waving the letters in his hands, and too excited to get his story into proper form, assailing his father's and mother's ears with a jumble of disconnected phrases. "What do you think!" he cried. "Harry Allen — you know who I mean — my best friend at school — he's been sick



LISTLESS FIGURES SPRAWLED ON THE STEPS

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—he's better now—his family's going abroad—doctor won't let him go—his father wants some one to keep him company—look after him—he's written me a letter—house at the seashore—just the two of us—camping out—hundred dollars a month, and expenses—
—is n't that bully!—is it all right?—can I go—?”

Mr. Randall stretched out his hand for the letters, and while Dick was gradually regaining his breath, he read them carefully through. Then he turned to his wife. “Can you spare him, mother?” he asked.

Mrs. Randall sighed, but nodded bravely. “If it will help him about his school,” she answered, “of course I can. It's just as you think best.”

Mr. Randall deliberated; Dick's eyes were fixed anxiously on his face. At length he nodded. “I think,” he said, “you are very lucky. We shall miss you, of course, but it seems like too good an offer to refuse. It's all right, Dick; you can go.”

CHAPTER II

A CHANGE OF SCENE

THE Western "flyer," eastward bound, was racing onward at unchecked speed. Dick Randall sat leaning comfortably back in his seat in the "sleeper," counting the mileposts as they flashed by. A day and night had passed since he had left his home; a few more hours would bring him to his journey's end.

"How queer it is," he reflected, "to be coming East again like this. Just as I'd settled down for a summer on the farm. It seems like a dream — the way it happened — and I would n't feel sure that it was n't, even now, if I did n't have it all written down, in black and white." And fumbling in the pocket of his coat he drew forth the letters which had made such a change in his plans, and for the twentieth time read them slowly through. The first, from Mr. Allen, was crisp, business-like, and to the point.

A Change of Scene

“MR. RICHARD RANDALL, DEAR SIR,” it began; and Dick paused for a moment to smile at this dignified title, before he read on, “I am wondering if you would care to consider a proposition which has been made necessary by the state of my son’s health. Harry, as you know, has never been over-strong, and this summer, shortly after the close of the school year, he had a sudden and quite serious collapse, in the shape of a nervous breakdown, caused by over-application to his books. Our whole family was to have sailed for Europe early in September, but the doctors deem it inadvisable for Harry to go, and wish us to send him, instead, to some place where he may have complete rest and quiet, with none of the fatigue and discomfort of a trip abroad. Accordingly, we have been considering the following change of plan: For years, we have spent our summers at a little place about fifty miles from the city, known as Sea Duck Cove. We have a cottage there, and the doctors think that this would be an ideal place for Harry to stay. They believe, however, — and this is why I am writing you, — that notwithstanding the fact that his health, by this time,

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is much improved, he should still have some one with him, to keep him company, and in a general way to look after him, and see that he does not do too much. As soon as they told us this, the question at once arose as to who this person should be. I had in mind an attendant who looked after me, some years ago, during an illness of my own — a quiet, reliable man, and an excellent nurse; but Harry immediately raised strenuous objections. In his somewhat remarkable language, with which you are doubtless familiar, he announced that ‘If the folks down at the Cove saw him going around with a trained nurse in tow, they might think he was batty, and had to have a keeper.’ And thus we came to something of a deadlock, until Harry happened to think of you. You might not, of course, care to consider such a proposition at all, but if you should, I am prepared to pay one hundred dollars a month and all expenses, while, apart from the question of compensation, I know that Harry would be delighted with the arrangement, for I think he regards you as his best friend among the boys at school. The present scheme is for Harry to stay at the cottage until late in the

A Change of Scene

fall, and to wait a year before he goes to college; perhaps going back to the Academy for the spring term, to take some extra courses, and to do some special work in English with Mr. Fenton. I don't know how this would affect your plans, but if you are able to see your way clear to an acceptance, we should all feel greatly pleased. Harry, I believe, is writing you by the same mail.

“Sincerely yours,

“HENRY S. ALLEN.”

Dick slowly refolded the letter, and thrust it back into his pocket. “Now, that,” he thought to himself, “is the kind of thing that makes a fellow feel good; expands his chest and increases his bump of self-esteem. ‘See my way clear to an acceptance’; that’s the part I like. You bet it did n’t take me long; just about a second and a half, I guess. And father was mighty good to let me go. Yes, sir, that’s certainly the sort of letter that a fellow likes to get, once in a while, whether he deserves it or not.”

For some moments he sat gazing idly out at the flying landscape before he turned his

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attention to the second letter, which he still held in his hand.

“DEAR DICK,” it ran, “you will be getting a letter from my father by this same mail. For Heaven’s sake, say you’ll come, and we will have a bully good time. I’m not half as sick as they think I am, though I did have an awfully mean job of it for a while. Whatever else you do, Dick, don’t ever go and get anything the matter with your nerves — it’s something fierce. I got so that I’d go to sleep nights and spout poetry to myself all night long in my dreams, and wake up in the morning feeling like a rag. And other times, I’d dream I was trying to pass examinations for college, and just at the last minute, before the exam. began, the professor in charge would get up and say that they had decided to make the test more thorough by printing the paper in Chinese. Imagine that for a nightmare — I tell you, it was awful. And then sometimes, for a change, I’d dream I was running the ‘quarter,’ and that everything depended on whether I won or not. And I never did. Something was always sure to happen. I’d lose a

A Change of Scene

shoe, or I'd fall down, or some fellow would pass me about five yards from the tape, and beat me out for first; and then I'd wake up with my heart pumping about a hundred and fifty to the minute, and breathing as if I'd just finished a Marathon. Oh, I had a fine time of it, for a week or two, but don't you care; I'm a lot better now, and all ready to enjoy life again. And as I say, if you'll come, we can have a dandy time. The cottage is all right, and if we want to, they'll let us have a cook; but I vote we go it alone. Then we can keep house just as we darn please. Meals at all hours — whenever we want 'em, and whatever we want. I always thought women were too fussy anyway; they're always dusting, or cleaning, or washing dishes, or something else like that; it wastes so much time. We'll lead the simple life, all right; and if they want to have one good clean-up after we've gone, why, they can. But we'll be too busy to be in the house much; I've got a power dory, and there's a big sand beach just a little ways from the house. So you can bring on a hammer and shot, and practise all you please. I'll bet that sounds good to you, you old Pentathlon win-

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ner, and here's something better yet. You're such a crank on shooting; that's what this place is famous for. There's a salt marsh, about two miles up the shore, where they get sandpipers and plover and yellowlegs; and a little later in the year, there's bang-up duck shooting out in the Bay. If you were a Sherlock Holmes, you might have deduced that already, from the name of the place — Sea Duck Cove. That's what they are — sea ducks — pretty tough eating, but it's good sport shooting them. And they have a market value, too; about thirty-five cents a pair. If you shoot straight, you'll have to be careful you don't get rich. You ought to see 'em on a stormy day in October — going in great long lines — sometimes two or three hundred in a flock — flying from early morning till late at night. You go out in a boat, you know, and anchor, and set out decoys, and when they swing in to you, you kill 'em. At least, that's the theory; I never was guilty of any great slaughter myself. I suppose I did n't have a good gun, or else the cartridges were damp. But since you think you're such a great shooter, I suppose you'll get a dory load every day. If you can't,

A Change of Scene

there's a man down there who can ; and that's old Hutchins, who looks after my boat for me. He says he shot his first sea duck when he was nine years old ; he's been at it, steady, ever since ; and he's about seventy now, and as tough as sole leather still. So you can see that he's accounted for quite a few of 'em in his day. He's a great old chap, and as crazy about shooting and fishing and natural history as you are, which is saying a good deal. But you wait till you see him ; I can just imagine how you'll talk each other deaf, dumb, and blind before you get through. He's got one great story, that begins, ' An' then, by cricky ! she come out nor'west in the night, an' the next morning we fitted to leeward o' the ledge, an' about a half-hour before sunrise, they started to come, one bunch after another—' But I won't spoil it for you ; you'll have to hear him tell it himself.

“ So you can see, Dick, that we ought to have plenty of fun ; and besides all that, we can do some work, too. I'll tutor you in your courses, if you want me to, and get you in shape so that when we go back for the second half-year, you'll be able to pass your finals, and we can

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enter college together. Why is n't that a good scheme? By the way, did you know that Mr. Fenton had been sick? He's had diphtheria; better now, but he won't go back, I hear, the whole of the first term. Old Smith, who taught mathematics, is going to be master in the mean time. Now, what do you know about that! I suppose he means all right, but I can't help thinking he'll make a mess of it, trying to run the school. He does n't understand boys; he's too much of a fossil. Too bad about Mr. Fenton, is n't it? But I suppose he'll be all right again by the second half-year.

"Well, good-bye for the present, Dick. Telegraph father right away that you'll come. I won't take no for an answer.

"Yours, as ever,

"HARRY."

Dick pocketed the two letters, and sat thinking contentedly of the prospect before him. He could scarcely have asked for better fortune. A chance to go boating — an opportunity to practise athletics — and best of all, there was the shooting. Harry's joke about getting rich, he reflected, had some truth in it, after all,

A Change of Scene

for the trustees of the Museum, with the question of expenses thus satisfactorily adjusted, had gladly contracted, in the matter of their bird collection, to take four specimens — two for skins, two to be mounted — of each variety which he might be able to secure on his trip. Altogether, his thoughts were of the pleasantest, and the hours passed quickly until the city was reached.

His first duty, he decided, was to call at Mr. Allen's office, and accordingly, somewhat bewildered by the noise and confusion of the streets, he made his way downtown, gazing admiringly at the tall skyscrapers on either hand, from time to time hailing a blue-coated policeman to inquire his way. At length he reached his destination, and as he entered the building, he saw, to his relief, on the doors of the first office which met his eye, "Allen and Company; Bankers and Brokers."

He entered, and approaching the clerk who sat nearest the door, he took off his hat, and in some embarrassment, inquired, "Is Mr. Allen at home?"

The clerk, glancing up at him, and possibly recalling the time when he himself had first

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come to the city, smiled, but not unkindly. "Yes, Mr. Allen's in," he answered; "straight ahead, please; right through the office. Give your name to the young man there at the desk."

Dick thanked him, and marched on, with the uncomfortable feeling that his face was unusually red, and that every one in the office was stopping work to eye him as he advanced. But when, a moment later, he was ushered into the private office, his courage at once returned. For Mr. Allen, though evidently busy, and with no time to waste, was none the less most pleasant and cordial, and Dick could not help contrasting his quick, incisive way of getting at the point of things with the leisurely methods of doing business which were in vogue at home.

"I'm very glad to see you, Mr. Randall," he began, "and very glad that you felt able to accept. I've left most of the details of the trip in Harry's hands; you can talk those over with him when you go to the house. He's waiting for you there, and anxious to see you, I know. There's just one matter that I wish to speak to you about myself. I can't see that

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there's much chance of your coming to grief, in any way, down at the Cove, but still there's always some risk about everything connected with salt water, and I want you to remember to be careful. If at any time you're in doubt as to what you had better do, bear in mind that Harry is the only boy we've got, and keep on the safe side. I feel confident, from what Harry says himself, and more particularly from what Mr. Fenton writes me, that you are a boy who can take a little responsibility without letting it frighten you, and that's all I'm asking you to do now. I don't expect impossibilities of you; I want you both to have a pleasant summer; and I don't ask you to baby yourselves in any way. Only—don't take chances, especially where there's nothing to be gained. I think that is all; unless there is something which you would like to ask me."

"There's just one thing, if I'm not troubling you," Dick answered; "I've got a chance to earn a little money, collecting some birds for the Museum at home. I have a letter from the trustees, saying that they are anxious to secure the specimens, and I thought that, with a letter from you, I could get an ornitholo-

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gist's license at the Game Commissioners' so that I could go ahead with a clear conscience. Of course a great many of the birds are n't protected by law, anyway, but I thought, if I happened by accident to run across a rare specimen, I'd like to feel that I could try to get it without violating any of the laws of the state. So if you would n't mind writing me a line of introduction, I'd be much obliged."

Mr. Allen nodded. "I'll do it gladly," he answered. And an hour later, when Dick rang the bell at Harry's house on the avenue, his license was reposing in safety in his pocket, and he was at liberty to begin his collection whenever the chance should come.

Harry himself came to the door to meet him, rather thin and pale, but looking, on the whole, far better than Dick had expected. And then, after their first greetings were over, for two solid hours, before lunch was ready, they talked steadily, of past, present, and future, — all the gossip of the school, — reminiscences of sport and study, — and with still livelier enthusiasm of their coming trip. Harry had much to say of the Cove, — its beauty, its salt breezes from the sea, the fun of cruising around in the Bay,

A Change of Scene

—and when, at Dick's eager questioning, he launched forth again on his descriptions of the shooting, Dick's heart actually beat faster, and he found himself wishing that they were already there.

Luncheon despatched, they made their way to the station, and by two o'clock were fairly on their way. It was a three hours' journey, and though the train at the start was quite well filled, by the time they had begun to near the Cove, they had the car practically to themselves, and in consequence took more notice than they might otherwise have done of their remaining fellow-travellers.

Harry was the first to call attention to the man who sat across the aisle from them, a few seats forward in the car. "Get on to the venerable old chap with the hat, Dick," he whispered; "looks like kind of an interesting character. What 'll you bet he is n't a minister?"

Dick glanced forward; then shook his head. "No, he's no preacher," he replied. "I can tell the holy kind as far as I can see 'em. He looks more like a good old sport to me."

There appeared, indeed, to be some reason for their difference of opinion. The man who

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had attracted Harry's attention belonged to a party of four, sitting together with the back of one of their seats reversed, so that the "venerable old chap" and his companion were facing Harry and Dick. He was a man of about sixty, slender of frame, neatly dressed in black, with hair and mustache of snowy white. Something about him, as Harry had suggested, smacked of the parson, though just what it was, it would have been hard to say. Perhaps it was his clerical-looking white tie; perhaps the glossy silk hat which had caught Harry's notice; or it might have been his benevolent smile; whatever it was, Harry's guess certainly seemed to be well within reason. And yet, on the other hand, Dick's theory also appeared to have some foundation. The stranger's complexion was rather too rosy for a man in the habit of denying himself the good things of life, and his twinkling eye seemed to belong rather to a man of the world than to one of the cloth. But as Dick's glance passed on to the other occupant of the seat, he straightway forgot the older man altogether. "Jee-rusalem," he exclaimed, "will you look at Hercules! See those shoulders, Harry. Would n't he be

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a bird with the hammer! I have n't seen a man with a build like that for a dog's age."

Harry looked, and nodded assent. Not only in contrast with the slender figure of his elderly comrade, but even in comparison with the other two members of the group, both men of average size and build, the stranger who sat facing them loomed up like a veritable giant. It was not so much his size, — both of the boys had seen enough of athletics, and of athletes, to know that mere weight and bulk are more apt to be hindrances than helps, — but this man, with his broad shoulders and deep-arched chest, in every line of his well-knit figure, even in the careless, confident poise of his head, showed that unmistakable something which characterizes the man of real strength and vigor, and Harry, as he looked him over, felt that Dick's words were well deserved.

"He's certainly a dandy," he rejoined. "I'd like to see him playing centre on one of the college teams. I'd just as soon be run over by a steam roller as have him fall on me, any day."

As he spoke, the big man glanced out of the window, said something to his companions, and they began at once to collect their baggage,

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evidently making ready to alight at the next stop. "Sea Duck Cove is the next station," Harry whispered to Dick, "perhaps they're going to be neighbors of ours. You may get on a match with the hammer, after all."

Dick laughed ; and then, as he noticed the preparations going on across the aisle, he observed, "Well, they've luggage enough anyway. I dare say the big chap has half a dozen hammers stowed away in those grips, by the way they look. Or else he's not half as strong as we think he is."

Their fellow-travellers, indeed, had suddenly produced, from overhead and from underfoot, a large collection of bags and dress-suit cases, — no less than six or eight, at the least, — while the big man had already started down the aisle for the end of the car with a huge valise in either hand. It was the evident strain on his arms, and the tense manner in which he held his shoulders, that had called forth Dick's comment.

Harry, as he lifted his own bag down from the rack, watched him a moment before he replied. "Oh, I guess he's strong enough," he answered, "it's the bags that are making the trouble."

A Change of Scene

Those are n't grips, Dick; those are a couple of healthy young trunks, that's what they are. They look to me as if they'd weigh a ton."

Before Dick could reply, the train, with a series of jolts and jerks, began to slacken speed, and presently the conductor was bellowing most unmusically, "*Sea Duck Cove. Sea Duck Cove. Do not leave any articles-in-the-car. Sea Duck Co-o-o-ve,*" and a moment later, they had alighted, and were making their way up the platform, where the two station carriages stood waiting in the sun, the horses drowsing sleepily, with drooping heads, occasionally mustering sufficient animation to switch away the flies which clustered on their flanks. As the boys came up, they perceived that the other travellers had lost no time. They, and their baggage, were already tucked safely away in the two carriages, and the teams were just about to start, when the stable-keeper espied Harry.

"Hullo, young man," he called cheerfully; "glad to see you again. Heard you'd been sick, but you look pretty good. Going over to the cottage?"

Harry nodded, as he shook hands. "Sure,"

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he answered, "but I don't see what we're going in. Big rush of business to-day."

The man considered. "Well, now, that's too bad," he answered; "you've got me this time, all right. We have n't a horse left in the stable. And there won't be one in for a half-hour yet." He turned sharply on his heel. "Say, General," he said to the elderly stranger, "do you mind if you all get in one team, and let me send your stuff over in an express wagon. Then we can let these boys go down in the other team."

The old gentleman looked somewhat pained at the suggestion. "It would be something of an inconvenience," he replied, courteously enough, "but if my young friends insist upon it—"

Harry broke in upon him. "No, no, that's all right," he said hastily, "we don't insist on anything. You had the carriage first; you've got a perfect right to it; come on, Dick; we'll wait till the other team comes back."

The stranger beamed his approval. "I thank you, most sincerely," he said. "I assure you that I appreciate your courtesy. Perhaps, at some future time—"

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But what it was that he intended doing at that future time, the boys never heard, for the driver, at a signal from the proprietor, whipped up his horse, and the wagons disappeared down the road.

The half-hour's wait was lengthened to nearly double that time, and when they were at last under way, they had traversed little more than a third of their journey when they met the carriages which the strangers had occupied returning toward the town.

"Pull up a minute, will you, please," Harry said to the driver, and hailing the man in charge of the approaching team, he asked, "Where did you leave your friends?"

The man grinned. "Ain't no friends of mine," he retorted, "they 're a funny bunch, the whole of 'em. Left 'em puttin' out to sea in a power boat, bag and baggage. Whew! but those valises weighed some. The big cuss pretty nigh broke a blood vessel, gettin' 'em aboard. If they have bad weather, they 'll sink, sure as a gun."

Speculating with interest as to what the party could be up to, the boys drove on, arriving at the Allen cottage just at dusk. Dick

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could see little more than that the house was built on top of a high piece of ground, within a stone's throw of the sea, completely isolated, and seemingly possessing a beautiful view of the ocean and the Bay. Harry led him around to the broad veranda, and tried to point out the various landmarks to him, though in the darkness it was difficult to distinguish anything with certainty. They could see the outline of the Cove, and Harry's power boat, anchored off the rocks. A low island, quite a distance from the shore, loomed up, a shapeless bulk, through the haze, and as Harry was pointing it out, they heard the noise of a motor boat, and could dimly descry a faint shape heading out to sea.

"Bet you those are our friends," Harry exclaimed; "there's a house on the Island. Shouldn't wonder if they were going there to camp. People do, sometimes. Cheerful time to make a landing. Well, let's look after ourselves, Dick. I'm tired. Some supper, and then I guess bed's the place for me."



TRIED TO POINT OUT THE VARIOUS LANDMARKS

CHAPTER III

JIM HUTCHINS

IT was after sunrise when Dick awoke. For a moment or two he lay bewildered, scarcely knowing where he was; then all at once the crowded events of the day before came rushing into his mind, and an instant later, eager to view his new surroundings by daylight, he had jumped out of bed, and, without wasting much time in the process, had scrambled hastily into his clothes. A glance next door showed him that Harry was still asleep, and making his way quietly out on the veranda, he had his first fair look at Sea Duck Cove.

Even the people who came there, year after year, never wearied of its charm, but to Dick, brought up in the farming country, far out of sight and hearing of the sea, the scene before him was like fairyland. The great wide ocean lay spread beneath him, cool and calm and blue, stretching away in the distance as

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far as the eye could see; a fresh breeze from the westward flecked its smooth surface here and there with foam; while the sun, now risen well above the horizon, cast a broad path of light, sparkling like gold, across the waters of the Bay. To the northeast, a mile or so from shore, lay the island which Harry had pointed out the night before, and as his eye fell upon it he saw, from behind the cliffs, a slender column of smoke rising upward against the sky. At the sight he gave an involuntary exclamation of surprise. "The boat did stop there, then," he muttered. And although he knew that the party could be nothing more than campers, yet at the same time their presence on the Island, and the whole manner of their coming, seemed to take on an air of mystery; and at the sight of the smoke mounting upward, random memories of his boyish reading—tales of soldiers and sailors, of block-houses and Indians, of pirates and buried gold—came crowding to his mind.

Between the Island and the beach, the sea broke lazily, in a dozen places, over the brown of the sunken reefs; evidently, to cruise the Bay in safety, a man must know these waters

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well. To the right the shore ended abruptly in a tall, frowning headland of precipitous cliffs, cutting off from sight everything that lay beyond, and leaving nothing else to meet the eye save the mighty stretches of the open sea. To the left lay the long, curving beach of smooth, firm sand,—an ideal place for athletics, as Harry had said; and beyond it rose a succession of other headlands, enclosing smaller coves and bays, until at last the low line of the shore first grew dim, then vanished altogether, as it blended with the faint haze which overhung the sea.

In spite of all that Harry had said about the loneliness of the Cove, signs of other inhabitants were not lacking. From a tent halfway down the beach, Dick saw two men emerge, run down to the water, and plunge in for their morning swim. In the distance a dozen power boats were putting out to sea, and nearer at hand a dory not unlike their own was cruising leisurely along the shore. What its owner was doing, Dick could not fathom. Every fifty yards or so he would shut off his power, stoop over the side, pull vigorously on a long line, and then haul a curious-looking

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cage into the boat, and bending over it would either take something out or put something in,— Dick could not see which,—and finally would drop it over the side again, and make his way on toward the next.

“Now, I wonder what he’s doing,” Dick muttered; “some kind of fishing, I suppose, but I wonder what. I’ll ask Harry, when he wakes up.”

As if in answer to his resolve, a moment later Harry himself appeared in the doorway, stretching his arms above his head, as if he still felt the need of sleep. “Hullo there,” he called, “what kind of a night did you have, Dick?”

Dick laughed. “Fine,” he replied; “this sleep business does n’t bother me much. I just hit the pillow, and it’s all off for the next eight hours. How did you get along, Harry? All right?”

“First-rate,” Allen answered. “I have n’t had such a good sleep for a long time. I believe I feel better already. Anyway, I’ll make a bargain with you, Dick; you get some grub ready, and I’ll eat it.”

“That’s the way to talk,” Dick rejoined;

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“great thing to have an appetite. If you don’t have an awful relapse from my cooking, you’ll be in shape again in no time.”

“Well, I’ll have to risk it,” returned Harry, “and as soon as we’re through breakfast, I vote we go out in the boat. This is one of the good days; we can’t afford to waste it.”

The breakfast was a success in every way, and half an hour later the two boys had pushed the skiff off from the beach, and were rowing slowly out to the power boat. As they stepped aboard, Dick looked about him with approval; the dory seemed staunch and able, and her lines suggested speed as well. But at the engine he gazed with doubt.

“Harry,” he said, “I’m a poor mechanic. That part of my education was neglected. If main strength and stupidity will help you any, I’m just the man you want, but if it’s brains you need, don’t come looking here for ’em.”

Harry grinned. “Should n’t have thought of it,” he retorted, “but you don’t have to worry, Dick. I can run her all right, and I’m no shark on such things myself. This engine was one of those lucky finds you’ll make sometimes. She’s six years old, and she grows

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better every year. If old man Hutchins has got everything in shape, the way I told him to, she'll go for us in no time. And I guess he has. What he does n't know about boats is n't worth knowing. You cast off now, Dick, so we won't get our mooring-line caught in the propeller, and then we'll give her a try."

Dick obeyed, and Harry, stooping, threw on the electric switch, and disconnecting the battery wire, scratched it gingerly on one of the bolts which held the head of the engine in place. A sharp spurt of crackling flame answered him, and he looked up at Dick with a smile.

"Batteries are O. K., anyway," he said.

Dick nodded. "I'll believe it, if you say so," he answered, "but it's all Greek to me. You've got me guessing, down here. I'm a farmer on the water, and I don't deny it. What makes you say the batteries are all right?"

Harry indicated the wooden box in the stern. "They're in there—all connected up—two sets of 'em," he answered, "and then these wires here run from the battery box and the spark coil to the engine and make the connec-

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tion; and when you get a spark like that, you don't have to worry about the batteries. Now, we'll give her a little drink of gasolene and see what she says. Tank's up forward, under the bow."

He replaced the wire on the head of the engine, turned the pit-cock, and then grasped the handle of the wheel, and turned it over. There was no response on the first try, or on the second, but on the third, there was a sudden *putt-putt-putt-putt*, and the dory started forward at a great rate, leaving a wake of white water behind. For a hundred yards or so she held her speed, then all at once the explosions from the engine became irregular, stopped, went jerkily on again, then ceased entirely, and the dory, slowing down, came quietly to a halt.

Dick chuckled. "Oh, you can run her," he observed with sarcasm, "the whangdoodle's got mixed with the pazzoozleum, I guess. Or the traces are caught in the whiffletree. But you don't care; you're a mechanic; you'll fix her all right, in an hour or two. Where are the row-locks. I'll get you home again."

Harry dropped the tiller-ropes, and came

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forward. "Now, don't you worry," he retorted; "you don't appreciate what a 'professor' I am. I'll give you a private demonstration of my system. See this little regulator here? — that varies the air pressure; see this little wheel? — that takes care of the gasolene. Now, I'm going to twist one, and then the other, and you'll notice a difference. Here we go —"

As he spoke, he cranked the wheel again, and, sure enough, this time the engine, after some preliminary coughing and spluttering, settled down to a steady, rhythmical beat, and soon the shore began to dwindle and fade behind them.

Dick nodded. "Harry," he said, "I humbly apologize. You're the only original engine-tamer. I begin to think we won't have to row after all."

"Of course we won't," Harry returned, "she'll run now till the cows come home. You just fill that oil cup, will you, and then we'll be all serene. Some folks say you want to be careful not to give an engine too much oil, but my notion is that nine times out of ten you don't give her enough. There,

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that sounds better. Now, where shall we go?"

"I don't care," Dick responded, stretching himself at ease on the forward thwart; "this is good enough for me. Anywhere you say."

Harry pointed down the shore, beyond the further end of the long sand beach. "I'll tell you what we'll do," he said; "see that cottage down there, by the wharf? That's where old Hutchins lives. We'll run down and see him, and pass the time of day."

"Good idea," Dick answered; "just what I'd like to do."

Twenty minutes later they shot in alongside of the wharf. Another dory lay anchored there, and Dick immediately recognized her as the boat he had seen that morning.

"Say, Harry," he observed, "Hutchins must have been the man I was watching before breakfast. I meant to ask you what he was doing and then I forgot it. He was going through the queerest performance—catching some sort of fish, I suppose; he was hauling big wooden traps out of the water, but I could n't see what he was getting. He hauled a lot of 'em, too."

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Harry laughed good-naturedly. "Well, you *are* a farmer, Dick," he replied; "those were lobster-pots. That's one of the principal occupations of the Cove. The last year or two, I believe, they've done better to the westward, further down the shore, but Hutchins always sticks to the Bay. He has it mostly to himself, and he knows every rock and reef between here and the Island as well as you know your name. They claim that if a lobster once comes into the Cove, it's all up with him: old Hutchins is going to get him before he's through. He does pretty well at it, all the year around, and through the summer months he really makes a mighty good living."

Dick became interested at once. "Say, Harry," he remarked, "don't think I'm getting crazy over making money, because I'm not. But what do you call a good living? Is there really much in it? Do you suppose I could get some traps together, myself, and manage to make a few dollars on the side?"

"I don't see why you could n't," Harry answered; "we might just as well be doing that as loafing around all the time. I don't know a great deal about lobstering, but we

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can ask the old man. And he'll tell us the truth, too. If there's a chance, he'll let us know how we ought to go at it. He's as straight as a die."

They landed, walked up the path, and knocked at the door of the little cottage. "Come in," shouted a voice, and entering, they found Hutchins seated at the breakfast table.

At once he put down the big bowl of coffee which he was in the act of raising, with both hands, to his lips. "Well, well," he cried; "glad to see ye, Harry. How be ye? Come right in."

As the boys entered, Dick eyed the old man with interest. He was tall, spare, and sinewy; bronzed by exposure to the weather; and though his long white beard gave him, at first sight, an appearance of great age, yet his voice was strong and hearty, his eye was bright, and his step, as he rose and came forward to greet them, was as light and active as a boy's.

"So the dory got ye here all right, did she?" he observed. "I thought it sounded mighty like that old scrap-heap of your'n you call an

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ingine, comin' puffin' an' wheezin' down the Bay. There ain't but one other noise in the world that's like that boat of your'n when she gits under way, an' that's a kid beatin' on a tin pan, pretendin' it's a drum. It's a scandal to the Cove."

Harry raised a protesting hand. "Hold on! hold on!" he cried, "you're jealous. I've got the best engine in the Bay, and you're mad because yours can't come up to it. You say another word against my boat, and I'll challenge you to a race out around the Island and back. I can trim you, too, and don't you forget it. But we'll put that off till some other day; I want you to meet my friend Dick Randall, Jim. He's my head nurse, cook and bottle-washer, and everything else on the programme; also first mate and assistant engineer of my ocean-going dory you're so envious of. Mr. Randall, Mr. Hutchins."

Dick stepped forward and shook the old man's hand, receiving such a vigorous grip in return that he winced, in spite of himself. Hutchins, however, seemed entirely unconscious that he was exerting a strength at all out of the ordinary, and Dick concluded that

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hauling lobster-pots must be a most beneficial exercise for the muscles.

The old man greeted him cordially. "I'm glad to know ye, Mr. Randall," he said. "Any friend o' Harry's is a friend o' mine. He's a pretty good kind of a boy, take him altogether, only I don't tell him so for fear he might get proud about it, so he'd swell up an' bust. Only trouble with him is, he wants to git cured up agin; 't ain't natural for boys as young as you be to be ailin'. Too much school-in', I reckon. I never had a sick day in my life, scarcely, that I can remember. We was brought up different, I guess, in the old days."

"Oh, I'll be all right," Harry broke in; "this is just what I need. Fresh air and good company; that's all a fellow can ask. But we want to talk business with you, Jim. Dick is something of a gunner, and he's got a job from a Museum in his town at home to send 'em a lot of birds, for specimens, while he's here. I told him maybe he could make a little something shooting sea ducks for the market, besides, and he was just asking me if it would be any use for him to start a line of lobster-

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pots, and try to help out a little that way, too. How would it work, Jim? Would there be any money in it?"

The old man considered; then turned to Dick. "Let's take the ducks first," he said; "how good a shot be ye, Dick?"

"Only fair," Dick answered. "I can hit 'em sometimes, though, when they're thick."

But Harry would not let this statement go unchallenged. "Don't you believe him, Jim," he said; "he's too modest. He's a regular sharpshooter, that's what he is. '*Bing!*' Another redskin bit the dust,' you know. Just like that. He can kill your old sea ducks for you as far as he can see 'em."

"That'll do from you, I guess," was Dick's only comment.

And Hutchins continued, "Well, here's the trouble, boys, with tryin' to shoot sea ducks for the market. In the first place, you see, your receipts ain't goin' to be so very big, however you try to figure it. Thirty-five cents a pair — that's the ev'rige price through the season, an' a man's certainly got to get some ducks, 'fore he can see much of a profit comin' to him. An' then his expenses count up like

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anythin', too. Powder an' shot an' shells are all plaguey high, these days, an' even after he's once fitted out, shootin' sea ducks ain't what you 'd call a reg'lar parlor game. Most days when there's a big flight on, it's blowin' like time, an' maybe rainin' too, an' with the ducks comin' along pretty fast, an' the boat a-tossin' an' a-pitchin', an' everythin' in a state o' general mix-up, sometimes I think, instead o' blamin' ourselves for the ducks we miss, we ought to kind o' pat ourselves on the back for managin' to hit 'em at all. If a feller can ev'rige a duck to three shells, right through the year, he's doin' all right, an' if he can ev'rige two ducks to five shells, he's one o' them sharpshooters Harry's talkin' about. So you boys won't find that shootin' ducks for market is any gold mine. But still, you can earn a dollar at it, now an' then, an' if Dick here is goin' after birds for specimens, he can kind of combine the two. 'Cause you can't ever tell what's goin' to come along, when you're lyin' out there in the Bay. I've killed some queer stragglers, in my time, while I was after sea ducks; I got a canvasback once, an' 'nother time a harlequin, an' once a wood duck, an'

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lots o' funny critters besides. I used to keep reg'lar count of 'em." He paused a moment, then turning to Dick, he added, "An' you say you can skin 'em, an' mount 'em, all proper, for this Museum o' yours."

Dick nodded. "I think so," he answered; "you see, I've been at it quite a while. I ought to be able to do a pretty fair job by this time."

From the old man's expression, it was easy to see his interest in the subject. Evidently, as Harry had predicted, he and Dick were to have many tastes in common. And presently he continued, "Yes, I used to set great store by such things. I liked to watch all the different kinds o' birds, an' whatever would come my way while I was shootin', I'd fetch home, an' skin, an' make up into collections, just the way you're goin' to do now. There was a chap I was 'quainted with — a real nice feller, too — that knew a sight about such things, an' one year, after he went home, he sent me a book for Christmas — 'A Key to North American Birds.' 'Leastways that was the name of it, but it would have taken a Philadelphia lawyer to tell you how to use it right. By Jiminy, how I used to work over that book.

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I'd set home here, nights, wrestlin' and fightin' with them jaw-breakin' furrin names, that would 'a' settled a college professor — let alone an uneddicated feller like me. Boys, them names was somethin' awful. A little ornery, no 'count hell-diver, they 'd call him '*Columbus*' somethin' or other, and the harlequin I got, I looked him up in the book, an' found they 'd give it to him, both barrels loaded the same, — *Histrionicus histrionicus*, — that's what they done to him. But the worst of all was the time I killed one o' them little auks, that I reckon had come strayin' down from the North Pole and kind o' got lost, an' did n't know how to git back again. Pore little critter, — he wa'n't no bigger'n a pint o' peanuts, anyway, — he come buzzin' in over the 'coys like a big bumblebee, an' I up an' give it to him, quick, 'fore I rightly thought what I was doin'. Once I got him in the boat, an' saw what a cunnin' little chap he was, darned if I was n't sorry ; I could 'a' kicked myself for shootin' at him at all; but there it was — I 'd killed him, an' that was all there was to it — 't was too late to do any good then. So I took him home, an' thought I 'd try to kind o' square my con-

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science by skinnin' him for the collection, an' then I come to look him up in the 'Key' to see what his right name was. I hunted and hunted, — set up most half the night it seemed to me, — lookin' up measurements an' descriptions an' all that; an' finally I found him. Then I went to studyin' auks in general, an' great sakes alive, boys, what do you think those gents that writ the book had christened one of them poor harmless little chaps. Git ready now — take a long breath — all together — *Synthlyboramphus wumizuzume!* Honest fact. I ain't lyin' or makin' up nothin'. What liar outside of an asylum *could* make up a name like that? Yes, sir, that's what they called him, for sure. An' I sat an' looked at my feller, lyin' there on the table, an' I felt *bad* — darned if I didn't. 'You pore little cuss,' I says, 'it ain't no fun to be dead, but to be dead an' then have folks know that one o' your family's ben luggin' around a name like that with him all his life — why, that's right down *tough* — that is.' An' I got up an' put away the 'Key,' an' never used it no more, an' I never shot no more little auks, neither, from that day to this. If ever I see one comin' by the boat, I git up

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and sing out, ' You got my sympathy,' an' let it go at that. Studyin' birds is all right, maybe, but a man wants to be eddicated first. 'Cause I remember, another time — ”

He paused for a moment, as he rose, and walked over to the mantel for his pipe. Dick was listening with the closest attention, but Harry, knowing from experience that, if the old man once got safely started on his shooting reminiscences, they would hear nothing else for the next hour or so, did not scruple to give the conversation a sudden turn.

“ Well, we 're coming over some night to have a good shooting talk with you, Jim,” he said, “ but this morning we 're all for business. We want to find out how to get rich, and you 've rather discouraged us on the duck proposition. Now, how about the lobsters? Any better prospect there ? ”

The old man considered again. “ You don't know nothin' about lobsterin', I suppose, neither of ye,” he said at last.

“ Not a thing,” Harry answered promptly.

And Dick added, “ I don't know anything about salt water at all, except that I can swim and row. I learned that much on a pond out

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home. But please don't think, Mr. Hutchins, that we're trying to butt in where we don't belong. The only reason Harry's asking you about these things is because I want to earn some money to put me through school and college, and if there's a chance to make a dollar at lobstering, why, I'd like to give it a try."

"H'm," ejaculated the old man, as he drew vigorously on his pipe, "now that seems a mighty foolish thing to me. Here's Harry, got sick from too much studyin', an' yet you're deliberately aimin' to scrape enough money together to go and send yourself to college, where they won't teach ye nothin' wuth learnin', anyhow. An' you'll go ahead an' work yourself to death, an' git yourself sick, just the way Harry's done. All foolishness, I expect. Howsomever, I s'pose it's your business, an' not mine. An' about lobsters; why, yes, there's certainly a pretty fair show. Some years, o' course, there ain't nothin' in it, but this fall lobsters is crawlin' good, an' since they opened up the big hotel down to the Point, prices is good, too. Most times the hard part would be to git your pots ready in time, but just now

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there happens to be a feller named Bill Kelly that's got tired o' fishin', an' wants to go to work in the city instead. He was tellin' me, only t' other day, that he wanted to git rid of his gear mighty bad, an' I guess I could buy ye fifty o' his pots for seventy-five cents apiece. You could use 'em till you go away, an' then I'll buy 'em back of ye for fifty cents—quarter off for wear and tear. That way, we'll all be doin' well — all except Bill — an' maybe it'll be a good thing for him, too. They say experience is awful valuable, an' he's bound to git some, I reckon, 'fore he's through. That's the way we could work it, if it suits you boys."

Harry was quick to see the value of the bargain which the old man was offering. "Suits us?" he echoed, "you bet it does. That's more than fair, Jim."

And Dick added, "That sounds fine. But do you suppose we could catch on to things quick enough so we'd really make any money out of it?"

Hutchins nodded. "'Course ye would," he answered; "this is an awful good year for lobsters, an' I can tell ye a good place to set your pots, an' show ye some o' the tricks o'

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baitin' 'em, an' all that kind o' thing. You'll make money, all right. An' if you don't want to have the trouble o' peddlin' 'em, I'll take all ye git at a cent under the market — fifteen for small, an' twenty-five for big. Ain't no doubt but what ye'd do well. It ain't such a great time now, but a little mite later, when there comes a good blow to rile the water up some, there'll be days when ye'll make as high as twelve or fifteen dollars, easy. Yes, I guess you're pretty safe investin' your money that way; leastways, that's how it looks to me. Well, I must go along, boys; I got a string o' pots way out the middle o' the Bay I'm goin' to haul. There's a great place out there. I'm prospectin' around to find where there's rocky bottom an' lots o' big lobsters. But I ain't found it yet; ain't got my bearings just right. I want to use it to fish next winter, when it's too rough to set in-shore. So I'll see you boys later, an' let ye know what Kelly says on pots."

Harry rose. "We'll walk down to the wharf with you," he said, "because maybe you can't get your engine started, and you'll need some one to help you that understands these things.

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If you really want to, we 'll give you a match race, too."

The old man chuckled. "If you boys are lookin' to make money," he returned, "for goodness' sake, don't go backin' that pore old craft o' your'n in no races. I s'pose, jest as like as not, I'll go out, an' haul, an' come back again, an' find you pore fellers still tied up t' the wharf, tryin' to git that miserable old ingine to go. When I heard ye comin' this mornin', I felt bad fur ye, listenin' to that dretful *rat-tat-tat-tat* she makes. It's really scan'lous. But if ye want a tow home, why, I'll give ye one. I b'lieve that's the safest way fur ye."

"Now, you look here — " Harry was beginning, when he suddenly stopped short at sight of the boat rounding the Point and making for the wharf—a power launch some thirty feet long, travelling at a good turn of speed. "There's a boat could trim us both, Jim," he said. "I wonder where she hails from. I never saw her before."

Hutchins became serious in his turn. "She b'longs to some folks that's campin' over on the Island," he replied. "I saw a big feller

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comin' ashore in her, up beyond your house, early yesterday mornin'. He anchored her there, an' went ashore in a skiff. She goes pretty good, but I reckon she ain't much of a sea boat. Bow ain't high enough, for one thing, an' she ain't got 'nough sheer to suit me. Howsomever, she might be all right, at that. Feller's comin' in here, I guess, by the looks."

As he spoke, the man in the stern shut off his power, and as the boat glided in toward them, Harry nudged Dick sharply. "That's the fellow," he said, "the one we saw on the train. No mistaking those shoulders. He's a whale, now, is n't he?"

Dick nodded. "I should say he was," he muttered in reply, "funny, is n't it?—the whole thing. Our noticing the crowd on the train, and then seeing them last night, and now seeing this chap again. I wonder what he's after."

His question was to be quickly answered. As the boat ran in alongside of the wharf, the stranger glanced up at the group above him. "Mr. Hutchins?" he asked, singling out Jim, and Hutchins nodded in reply.

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"All that's left of him," he answered cheerfully, and the skipper of the launch at once made fast, and stepped up on the wharf.

"My name is Johnson," he said. "We're spending the summer out on the Island yonder — my father and two brothers and myself. We understand there's money to be made down here, catching lobsters, and I came over to find out from you where I could get some traps."

The boys' faces fell. Here was unexpected competition. Perhaps Hutchins would refer the stranger to Kelly, and they would see their venture end in disaster at the very start. Yet they need have had no such fears.

Hutchins shook his head, with an air of complete discouragement. "Lobsterin' ain't what it was," he replied; "guess you would n't make out much at it. But if you want to try, there's a fellow named Pratt lives to the eastward, 'bout four miles from here, that I guess might sell ye some gear. Can't git there by boat, though; he's moved his stuff up home. You'd have to walk it, if you wanted to see him. And he's the only feller 'round here with pots to sell, at what I'd call the regular price.

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Don't you pay him more 'n two dollars apiece for 'em, 'cause they ain't wuth no more 'n that, whatever he tells ye. You take my advice on that."

The big man pondered. "Well," he said at length, "I don't know that I'm so keen for a four-mile walk, but we want those pots. Probably we can catch enough to eat, anyway. I think I'll go and see the man, if you'll give me the directions."

Hutchins willingly complied, and Johnson strode off up the wharf.

As he disappeared, the old man chuckled. "That feller I told him to go an' see," he confided, "is a reg'lar tough one at a trade. An' the stuff he's got is awful old. But I did n't tell this Johnson no lies. I told him Pratt was the only one I knew that had 'em for sale at reg'lar prices, an' that's true. 'Cause Kelly's away *under* on price. An' I don't want the Bay filled up with pots, anyhow. These fellers ain't got no call to spoil my fish-in', just 'cause they want to come down here campin' out. I'll see Kelly mighty quick, an' close with him, too. Won't take no chances on losin' them pots."

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Dick looked anxious. "Perhaps he'll get back before you see Kelly," he ventured; "perhaps this Pratt will tell him where to go. And then we're done for."

Hutchins had stepped down into his dory, pushed off her bow, and now stood looking up at them with a quizzical smile on his weather-beaten face. "Don't you do no worryin'," he said; "that Johnson feller looked big an' strong, an' I thought the exercise would n't do him no harm. But he won't be back this way for 'bout five hours, accordin' to my best calculations. I directed him right; ain't nothin' wrong about that; but maybe I got the distance a little mite out o' the way. I 'xpect he'll find it's a dretful long four miles. I don't figure I'll be around here when he gits back. He's a terrible strong-looking chap."

He winked with deep meaning, cranked his wheel, and the next moment the dory was forging out to sea.

Harry turned to Dick and grinned. "What think of Jim now?" he asked; "is n't he all right?"

And Dick nodded with conviction. The sun was beating down warmly from a cloudless

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sky; he thought of Johnson and his walk.
“A dretful long four miles,” he repeated.
“I guess, Harry, Jim is a good man to have
on our side.”

CHAPTER IV

MORE ACQUAINTANCES

AFTER dinner Dick insisted on Harry's taking a rest, and for some time both boys sat reading on the piazza, until at length Harry rose, laid aside his book, and, strolling out into the sunshine, stretched himself at full length upon the rocks.

"Say, Dick," he called presently, "this is too slow. We've loafed long enough. I vote we have some action, for a change. It's only three o'clock; let's go somewhere."

Dick came out and sat down beside him. "Well, let's see," he considered, "what is there to do? No use going shooting, I suppose. It isn't the right kind of a day."

Harry shook his head. "No, the weather's too fine," he answered; "there's got to be a storm before the ducks will fly much, as early in the season as this. We could go down to the marsh, I suppose, but it's not much of a day for shore birds, either, and it would be

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mighty hot down there, too. Why don't we walk over to the beach, and I'll watch you chuck weights for a while."

"Good idea," Dick agreed; "as long as we can't go shooting, and aren't fitted out for catching lobsters, the weights will be just the thing. I'll get the shot and hammer, and we'll go over."

Half an hour later they had reached the further end of the beach, where the firm, level sand stretched away, far into the distance on either hand. Harry helped Dick mark out the circles from which to throw, and seated himself at his ease to watch the practice.

Dick took two or three preliminary puts; then, as he came walking back up the beach, with the shot in his hand, he glanced inland, shading his eyes with his arm. "We're going to have an audience, Harry," he said; "guess we'll have to charge a quarter admission."

And Harry, turning, saw that two men had emerged from the tent at the top of the beach, and were coming toward them. As they drew nearer, the boys could see that they presented a marked contrast to one another. The man on the right was perhaps forty years of age,



A MARKED CONTRAST TO ONE ANOTHER

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short, broad, powerfully built, with a thick neck, a ruddy complexion, and a shrewd and humorous eye. His companion was much younger, tall, well-built, clean and lithe of limb. He was dressed in a pair of faded flannel trousers and a white sleeveless shirt, his face and arms tanned, by exposure to the sun, to the darkest of browns.

As they came within hailing distance, the older man greeted them pleasantly enough. "Afternoon, boys," he remarked; "trying to get a little exercise?"

To this somewhat obvious question they assented, and their new acquaintance continued, "Wonder if either of you happens to be named Allen? There's a young man of that name who lives somewhere around here, and I'm trying to locate him."

Harry looked up in surprise. "My name is Allen," he returned; "anything I can do for you?"

"Well, it's like this," the man replied; "a month or so ago, my friend and I came down here to the Cove to camp out. We understood the beach was town property, so we went ahead and put up our tent, not thinking that

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any one would object. And now they tell me that it's your father who owns the land, so I wanted to find you, and let you know that we didn't mean to do any trespassing. If you want us to get out, you say so, and we'll move."

Harry shook his head. "Why, no, that's all right," he answered. "I don't think my father would mind, and I'm sure we don't. If I want you to move, any time, I'll give you notice, but I don't think you need to worry. I can't see where you're doing us any harm."

The man seemed greatly relieved at his answer. "Well, now, we're much obliged," he said; "to tell the truth, we like it first-rate where we are, and we'd hate to have to get out, just at this time. So we're glad you're not going to fire us." He had been looking, as he talked, at the hammer and shot, lying at his feet, and now he seated himself at Harry's side. "Don't mind us," he said to Dick; "we'd like to see you throw the weights a bit. It's something we don't know much about."

"I don't know such a great deal myself," Dick answered. "I was only going to practise

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a little. I haven't thrown them for quite a while."

His long rest, however, had apparently done him no harm, but, on the contrary, seemed to have helped him, for after a few trials he made a put of thirty-eight feet with the shot, and then persuaded the younger of the two strangers to take a hand. It was easy to see, from the manner in which the newcomer held the shot, and the hesitating way in which he made his put, that he was a novice, yet he showed surprising strength, and though his preliminary step was taken so slowly that it did him little good, he got the weight away like lightning, and finally, after a little coaching, he made a put of nearly thirty-four feet.

When Dick changed to the hammer, however, he shook his head, and took his seat on the sand with the others. "That thing's too complicated for me," he said; "don't see how you swing it. I'd get my head twisted off, if I spun around with it, the way you do. There's a knack to it, all right."

Dick continued to throw until he had made a trial of about one hundred and fifty feet, and then, fearing to strain a muscle by too

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much work after his long rest, he declared himself satisfied.

As their new acquaintances rose to go, the older man turned to them and asked, "Won't you walk up to the tent, and see how we're fixed? We think we have the finest location on the shore."

Harry looked at his watch. "Sure," he answered, "we'll be glad to. Time enough, is n't there, Dick?"

Dick nodded. "That's the beauty of your system," he answered, "no supper to hurry for. Meals at all hours is the scheme; there's no doubt about it." And they strolled away up the beach.

Conversation with their new friends was not difficult. Both men seemed thoroughly well informed on all branches of sport, and the talk, having begun along athletic lines, ran the scale of ballplayers, track-men, and the like, until the tent was reached.

The location was all that its proud owner had claimed. From the woods, near at hand, a cool breeze, fragrant with the odor of the pines, swept down across the beach, and the tent itself, with its wooden floor, its two cot

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beds, its cooking-stove, and its one solitary easy-chair, seemed to the boys the most desirable of homes.

As they entered, Harry, somewhat to his surprise, noticed a pair of spiked running-shoes on the floor. "Hullo," he cried, "are you interested in athletics too?"

The stout man smiled. "Well," he answered, "in a way, we are. You see, the Kid here has an idea he can run; he thinks, when it comes to sprinting a hundred yards—"

The younger man looked uncomfortable. "Ah, quit your jollying," he muttered in embarrassment, but his companion paid no heed.

"I'm not jollying," he insisted; "he thinks that at a hundred yards there's no one in the country can trim him. Why," he added, turning to Dick, "if you'd offer to race him, now, on that little strip of turf we've got out behind the tent, he'd take you up as quick as a wink. What do you say? Just a friendly competition, to see if the Kid's as good as he thinks he is. Come on, you give him a go."

Dick hesitated. "Why, I'd just as lieves," he answered; "anything for sport. But I'm not much of a sprinter; ten and four fifths is

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about my limit. And I have n't any spikes, either; I did n't think I could use them down there on the sand."

The stout man looked him over, from head to foot. "You and the Kid are mighty near of a size," he observed; "only you're a bit stockier. I'll bet his things would fit you all right. Get another pair of shoes, and a suit of running-clothes out of your bag, Kid; I want to see a race, and we're going to have one. Runners are scarce around these parts. This is the first chance we've had."

The "trying-on" followed; a "regular Cinderella act," as Harry remarked. Both shoes and running-suit, as the stout man had predicted, proved an excellent fit, and five minutes later, the rival runners were warming up on the improvised course behind the tent. Dick could not help feeling surprised at the excellence of the track. The turf was firm, hard, and yet springy,—really an ideal place for sprinting,—while the hundred yards was carefully laid out, even to the finishing-posts and the line of worsted stretched between them at the end of the course. Evidently the "Kid," whoever he might be, took himself seriously, and even in

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his practice work was leaving no stone unturned to get into the best of form.

The manager of the impromptu race was bustling about in great delight. From his pocket he produced a pistol, and thrusting a blank cartridge into the breech, he handed it to Harry. "You get 'em off to a good start, now," he cautioned, "and I'll go down and judge at the finish. Don't let 'em steal on you, whatever you do; I hate to see a man steal on the gun." And he hurried away toward the end of the track.

Dick had been watching his opponent shrewdly out of the corner of his eye, but the Kid did not extend himself in his preliminary work, jogging up and down with little, mincing steps, so that it was really an impossibility to tell whether he knew anything about running or not.

The judge, having satisfied himself that the course was in shape, came hastening back to give his final instructions to the runners. "Now, Kid," he warned, "here's your chance to show what you're made of. Run hard, and run all the way. And if you see this young fellow drawing away from you, why, never

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mind; be game, and keep on trying. And you" — he swung around to Dick — "you look like a good-natured sort of boy, but I don't want you to have any sympathy for the Kid. This is all for fun, but it's a race, just the same. If you can beat him, why, beat him, good and plenty; that's all there is to that. So dig in, both of you, and let the best man win."

As he hurried off again, the contestants took their positions on the starting-line. As Dick began scraping out the hollows in the turf for his start, he experienced the same thrill of excitement that he had always felt at school, just before the beginning of a race. As Duncan McDonald had coached him, he strove to remember two things — not to let his muscles become too tense, and to keep his mind fixed on the crack of the pistol and the quick settling-down into his stride.

Harry, standing behind them, raised the muzzle of his pistol toward the sky. "Ready," he cried, — "on your marks!" And as the words passed his lips, he could not but admire the way in which the stranger fell into position. His was a different style from anything

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that Harry had seen at school, and there was a suggestion of power about the pose that made Dick's chances appear doubtful. Then, in a twinkling, "Get set!" and an instant later, the quick puff of smoke, the loud report of the pistol, and the race was on. The stranger had undeniably the best of the start, but immediately afterward he either slackened his speed, or else Dick increased his, for at twenty yards they were even, and at forty Randall was a yard to the good, and to Harry's eye looked like a sure winner. Yet Dick himself, through that curious sixth sense which most sprinters acquire, had the dubious feeling that, while he himself was doing his utmost, his opponent was taking things easily, and holding a spurt in reserve. The latter half of the race, indeed, proved that he was right, for at sixty yards the Kid moved up on even terms, at eighty he was a couple of yards in the lead, and struggle as Dick might, they crossed the line with the same margin separating them. The Kid had "made good."

As they turned and walked back toward the finish, Dick eyed his adversary with greatly increased respect. "Well, you trimmed me,"

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he remarked good-humoredly, "and I don't believe you tried your hardest, at that."

But the Kid was noncommittal. "Well, I've been practising a lot," he answered evasively; and before Dick had a chance to say anything more, they were back at the line, and their stout friend was advancing to meet them, stop-watch in hand.

"Fine!" he cried, "fine! That was quite a race. And as judge, I should say the Kid landed it by about five feet; unless," he added, turning to Dick, "you have a different idea on the subject."

Randall shook his head. "No, that's right," he rejoined; "he licked me, fair and square. What was the time? A little better than eleven, I should say."

The stout man held out the watch for their inspection. "Ten and four fifths," he replied; then, turning to his companion, he added, "Well, Kid, we've certainly got to hand it to you; you're a racer, and no mistake; and it didn't seem to me you were travelling as fast as you could, at that."

The younger man, instead of showing pleasure at these words of praise, frowned,

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while a somewhat bored expression overspread his face. "Ah, quit your jollying —" he began again.

But Dick, with his mind still on the race, broke in, "That's just what I was telling him. He didn't seem to me to be working at all. I believe he could run in ten and three-fifths, easy; maybe ten, two. Let's try it again."

The judge looked thoughtful for a moment, then suddenly exclaimed, "I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll make the Kid give you a handicap. That will pull him out, and show what he can really do. Perhaps he won't go any faster, after all."

"All right," Dick assented; "let's try it." And they walked back to the start again; but when his stout friend indicated the mark where he was to stand, he felt called upon to protest. "Oh, say," he remonstrated, "this is too much of a good thing. You're giving me ten yards' start if you're giving me an inch."

The stout man jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "Well, it is ten yards," he admitted, "but that doesn't make any difference. The Kid is n't kicking, so what do you care?"

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Dick looked, and perceived that his antagonist was nonchalantly preparing for the start.

The stranger chuckled. "The joke's on him," he whispered; "think how he'll have to hustle. Ten yards! He won't loaf this time, you can bet. Will he, now?"

"No," Dick answered, "of course he won't; but don't you see that you're spoiling the whole point of the thing, giving me a start like this. Suppose I run in eleven seconds—I'm pretty sure of doing that—then this ten yards is going to mean a whole second; and for him to catch me, he's got to do even time—ten seconds flat. And the man who could do that, under these conditions, would be a wonder—he'd be about the best in the business, that's what he'd be."

The stout man chuckled again. "Oh, sure," he agreed; "he'd be a wonder, all right. It's a great joke on the Kid. But you keep hustling, just the same; see how far you can lick him. It will be fun to see him work"; and stop-watch in hand, he hurried off toward the finish.

Dick stood staring after him, in some bewilderment of mind. Just where the remarkable humor of the situation came in he was unable

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to see, and concluding that their new acquaintance must be decidedly eccentric, he made ready for the second heat of the race.

Once more Harry gave the preliminary warnings, and Dick dropped on his marks, with a feeling that he was taking part in a most farcical performance. With the report of the pistol he was off to a good start, and tore down the stretch at top speed, heroically resisting the temptation to glance back over his shoulder, to see how far in the rear his competitor might be. But at about fifty yards, his attention was suddenly attracted by the peculiar actions of the judge. He was no longer standing motionless by the finish line, as in the preceding race, but was dancing up and down, apparently in the greatest excitement, shaking his clenched fists in the air, while his face underwent all the contortions of a man actually engaged in the contest itself, instead of merely watching it as a spectator. And in addition to his gestures, he was shouting at the top of his voice, in the picturesque vernacular of the track. "Come on! Come on!" was the burden of his speech, interspersed with frantic appeals to his friend, and at eighty

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yards, he grew almost inarticulate in his excitement; then recovered himself, by an effort, and fairly bellowed, "Come on! Come on! Dig, you dog, dig! Come on! Come on!"

There was something so irresistibly humorous about his whole appearance that Dick felt a strong desire to laugh, especially when he thought of the unfortunate Kid, toiling along in the rear; but the next moment his smile faded, and he buckled down desperately to his work, as out of the corner of his eye he beheld a flying figure, overhauling him at every stride, and heard the tense, compressed "*Ugh — ugh — ugh —*" which some sprinters utter when travelling at the very limit of their speed. The race was over, and he knew it; strive as he might, his efforts were of no avail. Ten yards from the tape, his opponent was on even terms; at the finish line, Dick was well in the rear.

He dropped his arms, halted, and turned to the stout stranger, his face a study in amazement. "Well, what the —" he began, and then stopped, unable to find words which would do justice to the occasion.

The stout man, his red face redder than



"WHAT THE—" HE BEGAN

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ever, was shaking from head to foot with laughter. "Excuse me, boys," he cried, as Harry joined them, looking, if such a thing were possible, even more bewildered than Dick himself; "that was n't a very nice thing to do, especially after you've been so square with us, but I meant it all in fun, at that. If I went too far, I beg pardon. Say, Kid," he broke off, "it's good and cool now. Why don't you take a jog, down the beach and back. It won't hurt you; light work next week, you know. And when you come back, I'll give you your rub. Now, boys," he added, as the Kid moved off in the direction of the beach, "sit down a minute, and let's have a little talk. You've been on the level with us, and I want to be the same with you. Let me tell you who we are, and then, if you want to, you can send us packing, on the double-quick. But I'd like to tell you the story first; that is, if you'd care to listen to it."

The boys assented in a breath, and sitting down in the shade near the tent, their new friend forthwith began. "My name is Murray, boys; Jack Murray — athletic trainer and all-round sporting man. But, I don't figure much

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in this business; it's the Kid that the story's about. His name is Harrington, and he comes from the West. Two years ago he'd cleaned up all the sprinters t' other side of the Mississippi, and then he made a match with 'Rocket' Flynn — you've heard of him, I suppose — ?”

Both boys nodded. Flynn was famous as the fastest professional sprinter in the East, but notorious for the suspicion of “crookedness” which always attended a match in which he was one of the participants.

“Well,” Murray continued, “I had a chance to see the Kid while he was training, — a man named Moulton was handling him, that I had influence with, — and it did n't take me long to make up my mind that the Kid was about the smoothest proposition at one hundred yards that I'd ever seen, and that friend Flynn was in for a good beating. The betting was five to two on Flynn, — no one knew how good the Kid really was, except Moulton and myself, — and I put up four hundred dollars against a thousand on my man. Well, to make a long story short, Flynn's trainer — a crook named Slattery — began to worry a bit, and the more he found out about things, the more

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worried he got. He knew Harrington was straight as a string, so he did the next best thing — he bought out Moulton. Think what a mean trick it was, boys ; there was the Kid, with all the faith in the world in his trainer, and that sneak actually had the heart to dope his man's food, just before the race. There was nothing to it, of course ; the Kid could hardly stand. He ought to have been in bed, instead of on a racecourse, and Flynn beat him five yards, looking back over his shoulder, and yelling to him to come on. Right there was where I began to take an interest in the game. I made friends with the Kid ; brought him to the best doctor in the state, and found out a few things that I wanted to know. Then I persuaded him to give Moulton the shake, and we both of us made a vow that we'd get square with the whole crowd, if it took us five years to do it. Luckily, we did n't have to wait that long. This spring, Slattery goes to work and announces a grand sweepstakes — professional championship of America, and a purse of a thousand dollars — to be run in October, the race, of course, especially designed for Mr. Rocket Flynn, while Slattery gets his

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money in admittance fees, gate receipts, and in betting on his man — or against him — whichever pays the best. Harrington and I did some tall thinking. The Kid thought the best we could do was to hold back his name till the last minute, but I made up my mind to take a long chance, and play the game a little bit different from usual. So I sent in his entry, the first thing, and then circulated the report that the Kid was going abroad for the summer, but would be back in time for the big race. As a matter of fact, he had a brother who was going over, so I had his brother's passage booked in the name of 'Kid' Harrington, and then I grabbed the Kid, came down here with him to the Cove, and lay low. The brother has been writing home all summer — as 'Kid' Harrington, of course — that he's in the shape of his life, going to beat Flynn a block in October, and all that sort of talk. And of course I've taken mighty good care, in a roundabout sort of way, to let Slattery and Flynn have a look at those letters. Now, what does Slattery do but bite, just as I hoped he would, and the first thing we know it's announced that the date of the

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race has been changed to the seventh of September, instead of October, which stops the Kid from getting home from England in time to run. There are sixteen entries altogether; our last report is that the betting's five to four on Flynn, against the field; and that suits us, right down to the ground. Why, look here—"

He paused a moment, thrust his hand into his pocket, and looked down, with a smile, at the collection of objects which he brought forth. "There," he remarked, "there's a nickel, a dime, a pipe, a shirt-stud and a suspender-button. Everything else I own I've bet on the field against Flynn—and, as you can guess, the field, to my way of thinking, is mostly Kid Harrington. So now, boys, you know who we are. I thought I'd tell you, and I'm going to ask you to let us stay here until after the race. If we have to move, it might make a difference to the Kid, and he's right at the top of his form—he was never in better shape in his life. If he's going to beat Flynn, now is his chance. And I'll give it to you straight, boys; I'm asking this more on his account than I am on my own. He doesn't say much, but he's a nice, quiet boy, and he

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has folks at home dependent on him that would feel almighty good to see him coming home with a thousand dollars in his jeans. Though it's not the money the Kid's after; it's beating Flynn, and getting his revenge. Perhaps you might not think we're acting square, but you've got to consider the crowd we're up against. You've no idea what a crook Slattery is. If we had n't worked things the way we have, and thrown him off the scent, he'd have found out what time the Kid was making, and have faked some excuse to call the race off. Then there would n't have been any purse to run for, and worse still, the Kid would have lost his chance of getting even. So I'm not ashamed of what we've done; I think we're justified; but if you don't like it, why, say so."

Harry pondered. "Well," he said at length, "of course I believe in being on the level with people, but at the same time, when you're dealing with a man like Slattery, that makes a different case of it. I don't blame you a bit; my sympathies are all with Harrington: and as far as I'm concerned, you can stay right where you are as long as you please. And you tell the Kid we wish him luck. Isn't that right, Dick?"

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Dick nodded. "Sure thing," he agreed; "a fellow like Slattery, who'll bribe a man to poison another, deserves all that's coming to him. I've got no use for him or for Flynn either. Say, Mr. Murray," he added eagerly, "could we see the race?"

"Of course you could," Murray answered; "we're going over by automobile. It's only twenty miles from here — an old deserted picnic-ground, but the track's a corker, as good a one as there is in the country. We'll take you over with us, and be glad to do it, too."

Dick was still thinking of the speed that Harrington had shown. "That will be great," he answered; but do you really think, Mr. Murray, that he can trim Flynn?"

In answer, the trainer held out his watch for Dick's inspection. "That's what he did against you," he answered, "and conditions weren't as good as they'll be at the grove, by a long shot."

Dick studied the face of the timepiece. The long, delicate hand stood midway between nine and four fifths and ten seconds flat. Dick's eyes gleamed. "That's certainly travelling," he said, "what a race it's going to be!"

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Murray nodded. "You can bet your life it will be a race," he replied grimly; "we're not claiming we've got a cinch. We want our chance; that's all. I think the Kid can beat him, but if we're licked, why, we won't squeal, but we'll take our medicine with the best grace we can."

Bidding the trainer good-bye, the boys walked slowly back to the beach where they had left the weights. Picking them up, they started on their journey home, and had reached the further end of the sand when they espied a brawny figure, plodding wearily toward them.

"Gosh!" ejaculated Dick, "that's the big chap Hutchins sent off to look for lobster-pots. Wonder how he got along."

As they drew nearer to the wayfarer, the answer to Dick's question was not hard to read. His black brows were drawn together in a sullen frown, the perspiration was rolling down his face, and he looked as if his trip had not been in the least a happy one.

Harry, however, ventured to hail him. "Did you get the pots?" he questioned.

The stranger, glancing up, recognized them,



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and nodded. "Sure I got the pots," he growled in answer; "I ought to have got something, oughtn't I, for walking a six-day-go-as-you-please after 'em. I'm looking for that old fool who told me it was four miles. I want to let him know just what I think about him."

He passed on, limping, and scowling more savagely than ever. Harry turned to Dick with a smile. "Lots doing at the Cove," he said; "I'm glad we came."

CHAPTER V

DICK MAKES A START

AN evening or two later, the boys were sitting on the piazza, after their supper, when they saw Hutchins's dory making her way up the Cove, with a skiff in tow. He came to anchor just beyond their moorings, rowed ashore, and a few moments later came striding up the path, gun and shell-bag in hand. Giving these to Harry for safe keeping, he took the chair which the boys offered him, and presently, after greetings had been exchanged, proceeded to tell them the news.

"Well," he began, "I been doin' a big business for you boys. First off, I seen Kelly, an' bought ye the fifty pots, at seventy-five cents each, an' five barrels o' salted herring besides. They don't smell like no garden o' roses, by a long shot, but they're awful good bait, f'r all that. An' then they was another thing we clean forgot, when we was talkin' shootin' t' other

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day, an' that 's decoys. If you 're goin' to git any ducks, ye got to have 'coys, sure as a gun. So I made it an even fifty dollars with Kelly, an' bought ye four strings — I got 'em out in the dory now. So there ye be — all ready to begin, any time ye say."

The boys made haste to thank him, and then Dick asked, "When shall we set the pots, Mr. Hutchins? I don't suppose we 'd do very well, trying to locate a place by ourselves. Could you help us sometime to-morrow, do you think?"

But greatly to the surprise of both, the old man shook his head. "No," he replied, "I could n't git no chance to-morrow, nohow. It's goin' to be a busy day. I don't see, anyways, how I c'n spare the time to help ye git out them pots. I'll tell ye where they be, but you 'll have to do any settin' that 's goin' to be done yourselves. I'll help ye haul 'em, maybe, but not to put 'em out. I ain't really got the time."

There was a pause, both Dick and Harry completely taken aback at this sudden change of base on the old man's part. "What on earth has got into him?" was Harry's dismayed

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thought; "I never knew him to be cranky before." And presently he answered, "Well, we're ever so much obliged to you, Jim, for taking so much trouble. It's been mighty good of you. Where will we find the traps, and where would you advise our setting them?"

The old man grinned. "Say, I caught a couple o' suckers that time," he chuckled; "I was foolin' ye, boys; I'll tell ye what I done to-day, while you was down to the marsh, tryin' to shoot sandpipers, when there was n't none to shoot—I took an' overhauled your gear a little mite, an' then I baited up an' set it for ye myself. Now, now, that's all right"—as both boys broke in on him at once, trying to find words to express their thanks—" 't wa'n't no bother at all, an' I think I set ye in a pretty good place, too. One reg'lar straight line, from the end o' Black Rock down as far as the Point. Red and white—they's the color o' your buoys—white, with two stripes o' red in the middle of 'em. We'll haul to-morrow, an' see what ye done."

At once Dick was all eagerness. "What time to-morrow," he demanded. "Can we haul the first thing in the morning?"

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“Easy, now, easy,” Hutchins answered; “you ’re two o’ the most dretful impatient boys I ever see. To-morrow was one o’ the things I come over to ask ye about. First place, tell me what ye see in the way o’ birds down on the marsh to-night;—or, no, hold on a minute,” he added, “you let me tell ye what ye saw, instead.”

Harry laughed. “You ’re pretty wise if you can do that, Jim,” he returned.

But Hutchins, nothing daunted, took a long look around at sea and sky, and finally went on, “Well, now, I tell ye what ye saw. Ye did n’t have no great shootin’, but ye noticed a considerable flight o’ birds, actin’ kind o’ uneasy like, an’ flyin’ straight along, as if they was in such a hurry to git somewheres that they did n’t have no time to stop. An’ on your way home, ye saw one flock o’ sea duck, maybe two, pokin’ along down toward the south’ard. That anywheres near right, or am I makin’ the wrong guess?”

The boys stared at him in surprise. “Now, how did you know all that?” Harry demanded.

And Dick added, “That ’s just what we did

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see. You only got one thing wrong; we saw three flocks of sea ducks, instead of two."

The old man chuckled. "Well, o' course," he rejoined, "I don't pretend to git it down as fine as that, but it wa'n't no trick to make a guess, an' I'll tell ye why. She's makin' up for an easterly; that's what she's doin'. Ye can tell by the looks o' the sky; ye can tell by the way the sea's heavin' in on the beach; an' I knew, nine times out o' ten, that's the way the birds begin to act the evenin' before she strikes. Now, the question is, do you boys want to go duckin' in the mornin'? Maybe it's goin' to be nasty; I expect she'll blow up kind o' lively in the night; but there's pretty sure to be a nice little flight o' ducks unless all signs fail. An' if you want to put me up here for the night, me promisin' not to steal your silver spoons, why, we'll git up along 'bout half-past three to-morrow mornin', an' give 'em a try. What do you say to that now?"

Dick's face was a study in joyful anticipation. "Oh, great!" he cried; "that will be bully. Of course we'll go, won't we, Harry?"

But Allen shook his head. "I don't believe I'd better," he said regretfully. "I get tired

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pretty easily, I find, and half-past three is an awfully early start. But you go ahead, Dick, and I'll put in a day on shore, by myself. It won't do me any harm to rest, for a change. I guess you can manage the engine all right; if you can't, Jim will be right near you, in his boat, and he'll help you out."

Dick nodded. "I think I can get along," he agreed; "but are you sure you don't mind being left alone, Harry? If you do, we'll let the ducks slide."

"Of course I don't," Harry answered. "You can go ahead with a clear conscience, Dick, and shoot all you see. I'll bet you a nickel right now you don't kill as many as Jim does. Got any sporting blood?"

Dick shook his head. "Can't expect me to shape up with the champion," he rejoined, "but I'll shoot as straight as I can, just the same. I'm going to get my things together now, so I'll be all ready for the morning. I'll set the alarm, Mr. Hutchins, and give you a call at half-past three."

Dick's room looked out directly on the water, and he went to sleep, wondering drowsily if the sound of the waves splashing in on the

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beach really foretold the coming of a storm, as Hutchins had predicted. With the first whirr from the alarm, in the dim gray of the morning, the question was answered. A lively breeze was sweeping through the open window, the sea was heaving in savagely against the rocks, and as Dick jumped from bed and peered out into the darkness, he could see that the whole sky was covered with driving clouds, rushing landward across the Bay. He called the old man, and quickly dressing and disposing of their meagre breakfast, they left the house and groped their way down toward the beach. As they pulled the skiff to the edge of the water, Dick noticed the heaps of upturned kelp and seaweed beneath his feet, and the strong, salt air from the sea struck sharply against his face. In imagination, he could see the flocks of wild fowl fighting their way along the shore of the Cove, and his heart beat faster as they rowed out, against the freshening breeze, to where the power boats lay tossing at anchor.

Even Hutchins showed more than his usual enthusiasm. "Ought to be a nice little flight," he observed, throwing a quick glance over his

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shoulder at the masses of dull clouds skimming low above their heads; "a gray day is a gun day, nine times out o' ten, 'specially with the wind anywhere 'tween nor'west an' south-east. I expect we might be goin' to do pretty fair with 'em, this morning."

He placed Dick on board Harry's dory, and then rowed on toward his own. Dick, with no little trepidation, tried the engine, but to his relief he had no trouble in starting it, and five minutes later he was following his companion's course straight out to the north-east of the Cove.

Presently Hutchins stopped his engine, and Dick, shooting up alongside, followed suit. "Now, then," called the old man, "I'll set your 'coys for ye here, an' then I'll take the berth next outside o' you. Won't be much difference 'tween 'em, I guess, this mornin'; we ought to both of us git some shots."

Suiting the action to the word, he began to toss over the decoys, and presently the little flock of wooden ducks lay securely in place, rising and falling to the heave of the sea, now and again dipping their bills into the water, as if they had alighted on some particularly choice feeding-ground.

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Hutchins waved a hand to the eastward. "Anchor up that way, 'bout a gunshot off," he cried; "I'll git along now, an' set outside. Most time they was beginnin' to fly."

Dick put on his power again, anchored as directed, and then loaded his gun and crouched low in the bottom of the dory, his eyes fixed on the flock of decoys. A faint light was already visible in the east, though the thickening clouds bore witness that there would be no sunshine, at least for a portion of the day. "A gray day is a gun day," Dick repeated to himself, and on the instant, as if to prove the saying true, he beheld a line of sea ducks coming straight for him, flying low to the water, hardly seeming high enough above it to clear it with their wings. Nearer and nearer they came, — fully twenty of them altogether, — and as they rose a little from the water, they caught sight of the decoys, and came straight in toward the boat, looming larger and larger every instant, and seeming to fill the air with the rapid whistle of their wings. The leaders of the flock rounded up nicely over the decoys, some lighting, but the greater part keeping on, as if suddenly distrustful of these wooden

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counterfeits who vouchsafed no sign of greeting to their friends. Dick sighted at a duck in the water, hesitated, wavered, shifted to one in the air, hesitated again, and before he knew it, all but half a dozen of the flock had passed on toward Hutchins's decoys. The remaining ducks were swimming about, heads high in air, evidently suspicious and ill-at-ease, and Dick saw that he must fire at once, or that they too would waste no time in getting out of range. But unaccustomed to the roughness of the water, he found that to take aim was no easy task. As soon as he levelled his gun, the dory would jerk upward into space, and the muzzle would be elevated or depressed, many yards from his game. And suddenly, while he was trying to steady himself, the ducks jumped. Dick fired desperately, with a feeling that he was going to miss. Nor was he mistaken. The birds flew on unscathed, and then, catching sight of Hutchins's decoys, swung in to him. "Now I'll see how he takes 'em," thought Dick, and on the instant the old man's spare figure raised itself from the bottom of the boat, his gun came swiftly to his shoulder, and simultaneously two birds in front of the

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flock crumpled up and fell stone dead. The rest drew together in the air, and Hutchins covered them with his second barrel until they had bunched to his satisfaction; then fired again, and once more two birds dropped to his aim. Dick could not but marvel at his skill, and at the same time he heaved a sigh of disgust over his own poor judgment. "I'm a lemon, all right," he reflected; "there were too many in that flock, and I had to go and get rattled. I hope the next bunch will be smaller, and I'll see if I can't get one."

Some fifteen minutes passed before he saw another bird, and then, as if in answer to his wish, a pair of ducks came down the Cove, well inshore, and swung out to the eastward of him, a long gunshot away. Waiting until he felt sure that they would come no further, he rose and let fly, and to his intense surprise, dropped one with each barrel, as neatly as Hutchins himself could have done. The old man, indeed, showed his appreciation of the shot by a vigorous yell, and a wave of his cap, and Dick, well pleased, hastened to pick up his game and get back to his anchorage again.

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They were the first sea ducks he had ever shot, but he recognized them at once from the specimens he had seen, and from the descriptions in his books on ornithology. They were coal-black, large and heavy, with a broad white patch on each wing, and a line of white on the sides of their heads. Their bills were flat and broad, curiously and gaudily shaded with red and crimson and orange. "White-winged scoters," Dick murmured to himself, "what Hutchins would call 'black white-wings.' Well they're first-rate specimens, anyway : there's a start for the collection."

Nor were his first pair the only ones that were to fall that morning to his aim. There was no immense flight of ducks,—it was too early in the season for that,—yet they came along every fifteen minutes or so—for the most part, in small bunches, and decoying splendidly. At first, he had the better of the shooting, although, for the matter of that, Hutchins managed to kill as many as he did from the scattered stragglers which branched off from the main flocks, after Dick had bombarded them, and then swung in over the old man's decoys. Gradually, however, the wind

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began to die out, and to shift more to the southeast; the sea grew smoother, and the ducks, flying less and less often, veered farther out to sea, and swung in to Hutchins instead of to Dick. The old man gunned them with consummate skill, seeming to know by instinct just the moment when they were in the best possible position for a shot, and every time his gun was levelled at a flock one or more ducks fell headlong to the water. Dick himself, after he had become a trifle more accustomed to the pitching of the boat, did better, and by eight o'clock he could count eleven ducks stowed away in the stern of the dory.

A half-hour later, Hutchins pulled in his decoys, and came alongside. "Well, I reckon it's about all over for to-day," he said; "leastways, there'll be more ducks along, but there won't be no great shooting; wind's come too far to the south'ard for that. You jump in with me, and we'll go ashore and git breakfast. Then we'll take Harry aboard, and come out again, and anchor him here at your decoys. It'll be calmed down quite a bit by then, an' he can set here an' pick up what-

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ever comes along, while you an' me goes an' hauls lobster-pots. That way, we'll all keep busy and happy, an' be makin' money, too."

Dick jumped aboard, taking gun, shells, and birds with him, and they started for the shore. On the journey in, they were busy talking over the morning's sport, discussing good and bad shots, lamenting the flocks that had passed over their decoys while they had been away, and occasionally looking back to see if another bunch was coming along.

Hutchins's birds lay neatly piled in the stern, and soon Dick queried, "How many did you get, Mr. Hutchins? Just about twenty, I figured."

"I ain't quite sure myself," the old man answered; "you count 'em up and see."

Forthwith Dick began numbering the pile of ducks, and had counted nearly all, when he happened to glance up, and at the sight before him his calculations came to an abrupt stop. "Twenty-one, twenty-two," he was saying, — and then, all at once, "Jumping Jerusalem! Shut off your power, Mr. Hutchins! Look at this flock coming!"

On the instant the old man jerked away the

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switch, and at the same moment reaching for his gun, he looked toward the shore. A flock of at least a hundred ducks was sweeping down the Cove, close to the water, in a long, irregular line.

"I don't suppose they'll come near us, will they?" Dick whispered; "I suppose they'll sheer off, when they see the boat."

"Can't tell," Hutchins answered, "if they're anythin' else but whitewings, we won't get a shot; if they're whitewings, they don't turn out for nothin'; an' we might git a good crack into 'em, like as not."

Their position, indeed, was a good one for a shot. They lay not more than a hundred yards from the rocks, and the long line of sea ducks was following the shore as closely as was possible. And as they drew nearer, Dick could catch the glint of white on their broad pinions, and an instant later Hutchins exclaimed, under his breath, "*They are* whitewings, every mother's son of 'em; durned if they ain't."

On and on they came, never swerving, Dick and Hutchins lying motionless in the bottom of the dory, waiting for the instant when the

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ducks should have come too far to withdraw from the trap which they were entering. And suddenly the point was reached, and Hutchins rose to his knees with a yell. At the sound the startled wild fowl lifted, and then bunched more closely together, presenting a solid wall of gleaming black. The moment had come. "Give it to 'em, Dick," cried Hutchins, and the four reports sounded almost as one. "*Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!*" Then silence, and from the centre of the flock seven ducks crashed down into the water, and lay motionless a stone's throw from the dory's bow. Dick drew a long breath of excitement. "By gracious," he exclaimed, "but that was luck. I'll bet you don't often get a shot like that."

"I'll bet you don't either," Hutchins rejoined; "never see a flock bunch any better than that one did, in all my days. That was clear luck, as you say; that raises our count considerable."

They gathered up the ducks, and ten minutes later were getting breakfast at the house. Harry, refreshed by a good night's sleep, was only too willing to go shooting and

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accordingly they brought him out to the dory and left him snugly ensconced, a book by his side, lying at ease in the bottom of the boat, his feet on the rail, assuring them that he would have a dozen ducks for them before they came in from hauling.

Hutchins started his engine, and as they neared the first in the line of pots, Dick felt his excitement increase. "Do you suppose we'll get any?" he ventured at length.

The old man nodded. "I cal'late," he answered, "that we ought to do pretty good. This little easterly must have stirred the bottom up some, an' set 'em to crawlin'. But I wouldn't guarantee nothin', at that. There's some folks will try to make you believe they know all about lobsterin'. Maybe they do; maybe they don't. But it's my own idee that there ain't a man livin' that understands much of what's goin' on down at the bottom of the sea, in the brains o' these funny-lookin' shell-fish critters. There's certain things, o' course, that any feller can find out, after he's been lobsterin' a little while. Every spring, for instance, soon as the water begins to git warmer, lobsters are goin' to strike in from offshore.

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'Bout the fust o' April, round these parts, you'll notice 'em comin' gallivantin' in, an' for a spell, you're apt to have pretty good fishin'. Some mornings you certainly do strike 'em good; three — four — five — to a pot — big and little — all sizes. I've often thought to myself what a sight it must be to see them fellers come traipsin' in over the bottom o' the ocean, like a great big army — over rocks, through the seaweed, over mud an' stones an' sand an' clay. I tell ye, I'd like to see it once, 'fore I die. Then, when they strike the shore, there comes a long wait, when ye don't do nothin' with 'em at all, 'cause they git into holes in the rocks, an' lay there, without stirrin' much, till they shed their shells. Then, 'bout fourth o' July, the fishin' picks up again, an' along about this time it ought to be pretty good for a spell, while they're movin' off shore, as the water commences to git cold. Things like them, any one can find out, but any further 'n that — to try to say what day is goin' to be good, an' what day is goin' to be bad — why, I reckon there ain't a man livin', leastways around these parts, that's able to do anythin' like that. But tellin' a

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good season, or a bad one — why, that's different altogether; this fall's goin' to be all right; I'd bet money on it. An' from now on, for the next two or three months, you'd ought to do pretty fair."

"I hope so," Dick answered. "I could manage to use a little money. But I don't know how I'm going to make out as a fisherman; I'm as green as grass when it comes to anything about salt water."

"Oh, I guess you'll do pretty good," the old man replied; "you got a healthy-lookin' pair o' shoulders on ye; I b'lieve you can stand the work, all right. But it ain't no easy job, neither, let me tell ye, workin' at it steady, right along, good weather and bad. But a man can make an honest livin' at it, anyhow; an' that's certainly somethin', these days."

Dick nodded. However rough the old man's exterior might be, he found himself admiring the kind heart and the sound commonsense which lay underneath. "I'm going to do my best, anyway," he returned, "and you're mighty good to help me."

"Oh, that's all right," Hutchins answered;

Dick makes a Start

“glad to do it. It’s to my advantage, anyway, as long as I git the pots when you’re through with ’em, but I’d help ye out, no matter how we’d fixed it, as long as you’re down here with Harry. He’s a nice boy, he is; I set great store by him, spite of his bein’ too much given to book-learnin’. Now, then, shut off the ingine; here we be at the first pot.”

Dick obeyed, and grasping the buoy as they shot past, began to haul in awkwardly on the line. The old man watched him for some moments in silence, then burst forth vigorously, “No, no; that ain’t right; don’t bend over so much. You’ll git tired to death, ’fore you haul fifty pots, if you go at it that way. Lean away from it more: git your back into it; there, that’s better—now, you’re doing fine.” And thus encouraged, Dick soon hauled the trap to the surface, and, leaning over the side, dragged it into the boat. Instantly his eye caught the gleam of a big red claw, gripped firmly against the netting at the end of the pot, and as he opened the door, he saw that he had caught not one but two lobsters, both good-sized, and fighting vigorously for their

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freedom as Hutchins grasped them and tossed them into the long box forward.

"Well, there's a start," the old man observed, "fifty cents to the good, right now, if ye don't git another one all day. I cal'lated that easterly would stir 'em ; I'm mighty glad I set your pots when I did ; we'd have missed a good day's fishing if I had n't got round to it, sure."

As he spoke, he slipped a fresh bag of herring on the bait wire, and shoved the pot over the side. As they made their way on again toward the next trap, he began to chuckle.

"Say," said he, "did you notice I had the line on that pot plenty long enough?" — and on Dick's assent, he continued, — "That's a reg'lar habit o' mine, an' there's a reason for it, too. One time, when I was a young feller, I thought I'd found a great place for lobsters, on a sunken ledge about five miles out to sea. I made soundin's, an' got my bear-in's, an' then one day I loaded on a string o' pots an' started out to try 'em. I knew the water wa'n't deep, but I put on eighteen fathom o' line to a pot, knowin' that would sure be plenty an' some to spare. I sailed out there

Dick makes a Start

flyin', an' once I got my marks right — Lewis's flagpole over the end o' Jones's barn, an' the big tree on the hill over the point o' Gull Ledge — I pitched over my first pot, an' then, what with there bein' a good lively sou'west breeze astern an' my gettin' thinkin' o' somethin' else, the way a young feller will, I kept busy pushin' over the pots, one to the right, one to the left, till the last one o' the dozen went in — *kersplash!* — an' then I trimmed my sheet aft, an' took a squint behind me to see how straight my line o' buoys was. Great Jiminy Whillikens! What do you s'pose? There warn't a darn buoy anywhere in sight. Like a young fool, I'd looked in a hurry, an' got Ed Nichols's flagstaff 'stead o' Lewis's, an' there I'd stood on half a mile too fur to sea, where the water was awful deep — more'n thirty fathom, I reckon — an' never a one o' them dozen pots did I see again. 'T would n't seem so bad now, — I've lost plenty o' pots, one way an' another, fust an' last, — but to a young boy, just startin' in, I tell ye it come hard, an' it made such a impression on me that ever since that time I've made my lines plenty long, an' then some more, so's not to git

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ketched that way again. It's somethin' I ain't never forgot."

"Well, that was tough," Dick answered; "I hope I don't go and do anything like that."

Hutchins shook his head. "There ain't no danger inshore here," he replied, "but you always want to keep your lines clear — no knots nor twists in 'em. That stops any danger of their foul'in', an' it saves 'em from mossin' up an' gittin' slimy; they do that terrible quick, though, anyway, no matter what you do. But the best thing about fishin' here in the Cove," he added, "is that there's only you an' me, an' them green fellers on the Island. I don't expect they'll follow it up much, either; I cal'late they don't even know rocky bottom from sandy, or pebbles from mud. They won't make no fortune out o' what they catch, 'specially with the gear the big chap brought from Pratt. It'll all rot out 'fore they've used it a month, an' then where'll they be? Out o' pocket I reckon, an' wishin' they had n't never started in. So fishin' around the Cove here is what you'd call nice an' peaceable like. But down to the westward, beyond the Neck, — say, but they're a tough crowd o' rascals an'

Dick makes a Start

don't you fergit it, neither. I knew a man started fishin' there, one time, — he was a good, steady kind of a chap, — been a farmer all his life, but got an idee there was more money in lobsters, — an' the very fust mornin' he sets, the other fisherman, not exactly relishin' the notion of a new man comin' into the field, gits up almighty early an' hauls his whole string o' pots for him, — steals his lobsters, and then goes addin' insult to injury, as the feller says, by baitin' up his pots for him with every darn kind o' garden truck you could think of, — a carrot in the first one, potato in the next, thumpin' big punkin in the next, an' so on through. Kind of a delicate hint, you understand, that he 'd do better to stick to the farm. A terrible mean trick, that was — it most broke the poor chap's heart, when he was expectin' such great things, to haul, an' then to find such a mass o' truck as that staring him in the face every time he got a pot in over the side. Oh, they're a rambunxious crowd, all right, them fellers be."

Dick could not help laughing. "It was certainly mean," he admitted, "and yet it was funny, too."

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But to this the old man would not assent. "No, sir," he said emphatically, "a thing that's mean *can't* be funny; that's all there is to that. But here we be at the next one; let's see what we'll count up here."

Along the line of traps they made their way, finding, as usual, that varying luck awaited them. In the main, however, they had excellent fishing, and as they pointed the dory's bow for home, they were able to boast of thirty-seven lobsters for their total.

"Well," the old man observed, appraising them with a critical eye, "I'll measure 'em fur ye when I come to throw 'em into the car, but I'd say, offhand, you'd got about eight dollars comin' to ye, to say nothin' o' the ducks ye shot. Pretty fair start, I call that," and to this Dick heartily agreed.

They found Harry lying in exactly the same position as when they had left him, too comfortably situated to do more than wave one hand at them over the rail as they drew near.

"Well," Dick hailed, "produce those ducks you were bragging about. I can't see any dozen birds anywhere around."

Dick makes a Start

Harry sat up, stretching himself and yawning luxuriously. "I had hard luck," he complained; "it was so nice out here that I think I must have half closed my eyes for a minute. Anyway, all at once I heard a queer kind of a rushing sound, and I looked up with a jump, and there, right over the decoys, was a dandy bunch of about thirty gray whitewings — great big fellows — with their wings set, just going to light. If I'd kept quiet, it would have been all right, but of course I had to go and grab for my gun, and my foot hit an oar, and knocked it down, and that scared them, and the end of it was that they just managed to keep on, without stopping, and I lost a corking shot. So that was bad luck to start with."

Hutchins chuckled. "Don't call that bad luck," he said; "call that downright bad management. Me an' Dick would have had about nine o' them fellers, I cal'late. Never mind, though. What more bad luck did you have?"

"Oh, everything went wrong," Harry responded; "next I had a pair of black butterbills come along. They swung in from off-shore, across the decoys, and I missed them."

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So I suppose they were too far off, because if they 'd been in range, they could never have escaped my deadly aim."

His eyes twinkled, as he spoke, and Hutchins grinned in reply. "Oh, we know all about your deadly aim," he said; "you're a good boy, Harry, but you were n't never cut out for a gunner. If you could kill 'em, pluggin' Latin and Greek an' po'try at 'em, there ain't a man on the shore could touch you. What else went wrong?"

"Oh, quite a little," answered Harry; "there was a nice bunch that came near enough, but I waited for 'em to swing around again, and they concluded they would n't, so I lost them. Then I missed three that came right over my head, and finally I had a little single gray coot come and light in the decoys, not twenty yards away. I thought I had him sure, and then, just as I was going to fire, he began making a queer kind of a quacking noise, as if he were glad to see the old wooden birds, and he swam up to 'em, sort of confiding-like, and — well, somehow I did n't shoot. I thought to myself that I was having a bully time out here, in the sunshine, and the good air, and

Dick makes a Start

all that, and I concluded probably he was too. So—I let him go, and watched him swimming around for a while, and really, I felt quite sorry when he heard your motor boat coming, and made off. I was beginning to feel quite well acquainted with him. As if I'd known him all my life."

At his words, uttered in perfect seriousness, Dick glanced down at the dead ducks in Hutchins's dory, and perhaps for the first time in his life a sudden wave of pity swept over him.

"Confound you, Harry," he said, "you take all the fun out of shooting."

But Hutchins shook his head. "I've felt that same way, lots o' times," he confessed; "but ain't it in the Bible?—'The fowls o' the air, an' the beasts o' the field—all these were made for man,' or words to that effect? That's what it says. You eat your spring lamb for dinner, Harry, an' don't make no kick. What's the difference with ducks?"

But Harry refused to be drawn into a discussion. "I'm only telling you how it made me feel," he said; "I'm not arguing as to what's right and what's wrong. We'll say

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I'm not cut out for a gunner, and let it go at that. We can't quarrel over that proposition. And I rather think," he added humorously, "that the gray coot was perfectly safe, whether I fired or whether I did n't. I'm like the fellow that said he could n't hit a flock of haystacks if they came flying past him. Well, let's go ashore, and get some dinner. I've got an appetite, anyway."

"Great idea," assented Dick, as he climbed over the rail of the dory. "I'll go you a special match, which can eat the most. Come on, and enter the competition, Mr. Hutchins; we'll make it a free-for-all."

But the old man shook his head. "No, thanks," he replied, "I'll go along now and haul my own pots. See you boys later." And before they could protest, he had waved his hand, and was gone.

"Now, what do you think of that?" Dick said; "isn't he the original cast-iron man from the foundry? Up since half-past three and as fresh as ever. He's a wonder. What do you think I'm going to do this afternoon, Harry? Bet you can't guess."

"Why," Harry reflected, "let me see.

Dick makes a Start

You've been shooting, and you've hauled your pots. I suppose you're going over to the beach to throw weights."

Dick laughed. "Not on your tintype," he answered. "I'll admit that the old man's worn me out. I'm going to eat a good dinner, and then rest a while, and then it's yours truly for his little bed. I'm tired to death, honestly, but I don't care. I'm going to make some money this summer, you see if I don't. And to-day is worth ten dollars, easy. I've made a start."

CHAPTER VI

THE RACE

SEPTEMBER seventh, the day set for the hundred-yards championship, dawned clear and bright, with a faint breeze from the westward rippling the surface of the Bay, and a warm sun blazing down out of a cloudless sky.

Promptly on the stroke of noon, the hour appointed by Murray for the start, the boys put in an appearance at the tent, to find the big automobile already waiting in the road, while Murray and the Kid were making sure, for the twentieth time, that nothing to be used in the day's struggle had been left behind.

Each of them, according to his temperament, showed the strain under which he was laboring. Murray was nervous, excited, talkative; the Kid so silent and morose that Dick seized the first opportunity to draw Murray to one side, and to ask anxiously, "He's all right, is n't he? He is n't sick?"

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“Sick? Of course not,” Murray answered with emphasis; “not a bit of it. He’s in the shape of his life, Dick. But every athlete acts a different way when race day comes, and the Kid always turns grouchy. That’s how I know he’s right; if he was good-natured and smiling, then I’d begin to worry. But you need n’t be afraid; you’ll see what he’s like when he trots out on his marks. He’s trained to the minute, and he has n’t had a bit of work for the last three days; he’s fit to run Flynn off his feet.”

A moment later they had taken their places in the motor, and were whirring swiftly away toward the scene of conflict, the boys luxuriating in the perfection of the autumn day, Murray and Harrington with a tense expression on their faces which showed better than words could have done that the race, and its outcome, was the one thought uppermost in their minds. At the rate they were travelling, no one was disposed to be very talkative, and the twenty miles was covered for the most part in silence.

At length Murray leaned forward and touched Dick on the shoulder, pointing to a

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grove of pine trees in the distance. "That's the place," he said, "and I suppose Mike Slattery's feeling just about in his element. Fine day—good attendance—big field—and I dare say the betting's three to two on Flynn by this time. But, oh, what a difference another half-hour's going to make. Slattery'll think they've reduced the steamer record from England to about a day and a half. If he has a weak heart, I pity him."

As he finished speaking, they reached the entrance to the grove and turned in at the gate, slackening speed as they encountered the rougher ground. Presently Murray rose from his seat and began looking around them. "Now, then, Bill," he called to the chauffeur, "pick out a soft spot, and turn into the bushes here. This is as far as the car goes; end of the line, for this trip."

The driver, though none too willingly, changed his speed, and gingerly drove the machine off the beaten track, threading his way among the trees until they were out of sight of the road.

"Good!" cried Murray, as the car came to a halt; "now, then, Kid, you stay here and

The Race

make yourself comfortable for a while. Harry, you stay with him, if you don't mind, and keep him company ; we'll be back soon. Dick, you come along with me." And followed by Randall he led the way toward the racecourse.

Emerging from the grove, Dick found himself in a large open space, where a tumble-down bandstand, a rotting pavilion, and the remains of a dance hall bore witness to the days when the grove had been a picnic-ground of note. Straight down the middle of the field ran the cinder track, rolled, scraped, watered, evidently in the splendid condition that Murray had claimed for it. Opposite the finish line some two thousand spectators filled the impromptu grand stand, hastily thrown together for the occasion, and nearer at hand, in the betting-ring, they could hear the shouts of the bookmakers as they laid their odds on or against the different favorites in the race. As Dick and the trainer made their way across the field, it soon became evident that Murray was well known among the members of the sporting fraternity. He was kept busy exchanging greetings on every hand, yet did not stop for any extended conversation until they met a small,

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rather flashily dressed man, who seemed to be the centre of the group who were still anxious to back their opinions of the runners with hard cash.

"That's 'Dutch' Myers," Murray whispered to Dick; "he's a bookmaker, but he's honest, and the best-informed man in the game. He'll tell me how things are looking, and whether Flynn is meant to win or not, which is something I'd like mighty well to know."

A moment later the two men were exchanging greetings. "Well, Jack," Myers observed, "I see you can't keep away when there's a race on. But you're not going to see much excitement to-day. This thing's just a gallop for Flynn; there are only two other men in the field that have a look-in, Miller and Harvey, and he won't have much trouble with them either. There's very little betting, but it's such a fine day that there's a big crowd down to see the fun. So Slattery will make money, as usual."

Murray nodded. "Yes, I imagined that was about the way matters stood," he replied; "still, there's always a difference of opinion about these things. I don't mind telling you,

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Dutch, in confidence, that I think Flynn's going to have a big surprise to-day. In fact, I'll make no secret of it; my money's laid against him, every cent I've got."

The bookmaker looked at him curiously. "What do you know, Jack?" he said in a low tone, evidently perceiving from Murray's manner that there was a double meaning in his words.

The trainer shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, I don't know anything," he retorted; "it's only the wise ones like Slattery and Flynn who know things. But I'd like to ask you a question, Dutch. You've always been on the square with me and with everyone else, and you're about the only man in this crowd" — he waved his hand contemptuously across the field — "that I'd care to put wise to something that might surprise people a lot. The question's this, Would it make any difference to you, in this race, if you knew Kid Harrington was here?"

If Myers felt surprised he did not show it. For a moment or two he meditated, then slowly shook his head. "I'm much obliged to you, Jack," he answered, "but, to tell the truth,

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if you're springing Harrington on 'em, with the idea that he can win, I'm afraid you're in wrong. Flynn's in grand shape ; he did nine and four fifths for Slattery last week, and repeated. You can't better that very much, Jack. You'd better hedge your money while you can."

Murray smiled. "It's the same old story," he rejoined ; "every man has his own opinion, and of course he's entitled to it. But I tell you again, Flynn's going to lose. However, you know your business by this time, if any one does ; I'm simply giving you the tip ; you can take it or leave it, as you choose. Only don't pass it along."

He moved on, and Dick noticed that the bookmaker looked after them long and earnestly, as if puzzled to know what to think of Murray's disclosure, before he turned back again to his work. A moment more and they had reached the starting-line, where a dozen or more of the contestants were already limbering up for the race.

Murray stopped to watch them, and presently called Dick's attention to a little man in a scarlet running-shirt and white running-

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drawers, with a stripe of red down the side. "That's Speedy Miller," he said, "the fastest man in the South, and next to Flynn and the Kid, the best man here to-day. He's a wonder up to fifty yards, but he's so small that from there on a taller man's stride begins to tell, and Miller is generally nosed out at the tape. But at forty yards, or fifty, he could beat the Kid, and at seventy-five it would be about an even thing. At a hundred, though, I'm not afraid of him. And there" — he added, as a tall, heavily built athlete, with a maple leaf embroidered on his shirt, jogged by — "is Tom Harvey, from Canada. He's the other extreme of the scale — strips at a hundred and eighty pounds, and is strong as a horse. But he can go some, and don't you forget it. He's done ten flat plenty of times, and he has a record of nine, four; but he did that when he was n't quite as heavy as he is now. Still, he's a fast man and a game racer, too. Say, Tom," he hailed, "where's Flynn to-day?"

Harvey pointed across the field. "Over in the tent," he answered, with a grin, "getting his final instructions from Slattery, I suppose."

Murray shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, he's

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‘meant,’ is n’t he?” he queried. “I hear he’s in great shape, just now.”

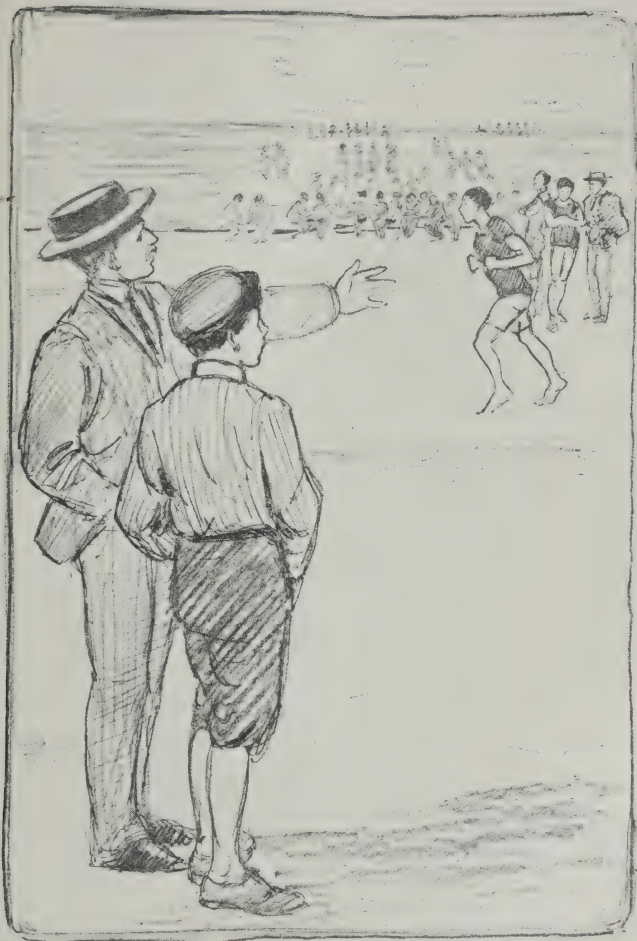
“Yes,” Harvey answered, “I believe he’s out to win. But you know what Slattery’s like. It’s hard work to tell much about that chap.”

“Yes, I know,” Murray rejoined; “come on, Dick, we’ll go and take a look at the champion.”

As they neared the tent which Harvey had pointed out to them, two men emerged, and Dick eyed them with the keenest interest. Surely, the small, bent figure, with the crafty face and the blinking, suspicious eyes, must be the far-famed Slattery, and as evidently the taller man in the black running-suit, with the broad, powerful shoulders and the long, muscular limbs, must be Rocket Flynn himself.

Their greeting to Murray was distinctly chilly, but the trainer did not seem to notice it, for he looked at Flynn with a smile. “Well, you’re looking fit, Rocket,” he observed. “I hear it’s going to be a cinch for you; nothing to it at all.”

Flynn vouchsafed no reply, but Slattery answered sourly, “Well, for once you’re right,



THAT'S SPEEDY MILLER

The Race

Jack. There's no man in the world could beat Flynn to-day, and that's the whole story. Some of the crowd fancy Miller; a few of 'em like Harvey; but they're only throwing their money away. I can call 'em for you, one — two — three. Flynn — Miller — Harvey — that's the order in the final heat."

"Perhaps you're right," Murray answered; "but when you say no man in the world could beat Rocket, that is n't so. Kid Harrington could beat him; he's running like a deer."

Slattery scowled. "Kid Harrington! Kid Harrington!" he repeated with scornful emphasis; "you've got Kid Harrington on the brain, Jack. Didn't we race him, a year ago, and didn't Rocket beat him in a walk? Harrington can't run."

Murray bit his lip. Clearly enough, he would have enjoyed giving his tongue free rein, but with an effort he held himself in check. "Harrington was n't right, that day," he retorted; "but when he's in shape he could give Flynn a yard and a beating. And you know it, too."

The champion seemed to think the time had come for him to share in the discussion. "Ah,

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g'wan with your Harringtons," he growled; "you're crazy with the heat, Jack. He's a ten, two man, an' that's all. I know a dozen amachooors could trim him. He's nothin' but a joke."

"Is that so!" Murray rejoined; "well, I'll make you a proposition. Will you run him next month, for a thousand a side?"

Flynn leered contemptuously. "Ah, let him get a reputation," he mocked; "I ain't runnin' every Tom, Dick, an' Harry. Let him get a reputation first, an' then we'll see."

Murray's eyes gleamed. "A reputation!" he repeated; "oh, he might have one by that time. He might have such a good one that you would n't feel like —"

But his sentence remained unfinished, for from the track they heard the voice of "Ed" Rogers, the veteran starter and clerk of course, shouting, "Last call! Last call! Competitors this way, and answer to their names. Last call!"

Instantly Murray turned and made off in the direction of the grove, while Flynn and Slattery, followed by Dick, walked hastily over to the start.

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The instructions from Rogers were of the briefest, for the contestants were all seasoned campaigners, knowing the racing-game and its rules from A to Z. Then followed the checking of the competitors' names, and Dick, feeling that the crucial moment had arrived, stood with his eyes fixed on Slattery's face, wondering how he would stand the shock which Murray had so carefully prepared for him. The other fifteen names had been called, and answered to, before the Kid's was finally reached. Rogers, shouting out "Number sixteen — Harrington," had already started to draw his pencil through the name, when he heard a voice from the outskirts of the crowd answer "Here!" — and wheeling about he saw Murray gazing at him with a smile on his face, while by his side, stripped and ready for the race, stood the man whom every one had supposed to be safely across the water, three thousand miles away — Kid Harrington himself!

But if the starter was surprised, it would have been hard to find words to describe Slattery's feelings. Amid the general turning of heads in Harrington's direction, he swung

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around as if some one had dealt him a blow, and, although his command of language when he was once aroused was notorious, he now stood silent, in utter amazement, until Flynn nudged him sharply in the ribs.

“Well,” he asked quickly, “what’s the game now? What do you want me to do?”

Slattery turned on him with a scowl. “Do?” he echoed, finding his voice at last; “there’s only one thing we *can* do. You can’t pull out now, or we’d never hear the last of it. You’ve got to run, and you’ve got to lick this chap. And you’ll have to go like the very devil to do it.”

Flynn’s face cleared. “That’s all right,” he answered confidently, speaking with evident relief; “I can lick him, if that’s all you want. I thought maybe —”

“There, there, that will do,” snapped Slattery.

And a moment later Dick and Harry were hurrying along toward the grand stand with the rest of the crowd, eager to obtain a good position from which to view the race. And now the spectators, noisy enough while these preliminaries had been going on, settled down

The Race

into absolute stillness, as the judges took their places at the tape and the announcer proclaimed through his megaphone that the race would be run in four heats of four men each, winners only to compete in the final. At once the entries for the first heat took their marks, and the boys could see that the Kid had the position furthest to the left, and that neither Miller, Harvey, nor Flynn had been assigned to the same heat. Then came the wail of the whistle, the answering wave of the judge's handkerchief, and the four figures crouched, ready for the start. A moment's breathless suspense — then the puff of smoke, the faint report of the pistol, and the racers were speeding away down the course. To the boys' delight, the Kid's superiority was evident, almost from the first. It was not so much the distance gained on the others, but it was plain to every one, even to those unfamiliar with Harrington's style of running, that he was travelling well within himself, and simply gauging his own speed by that of his antagonists. A moment later he broke the tape, comfortably in the lead, although the applause which greeted his victory was faint, since few

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of the spectators in the stand seemed to regard him in the light of a serious contender for the championship. And when his time was announced as ten and two fifths, the experts shook their heads. "A promising runner," was the general verdict, "but not in Flynn's class yet."

The other three heats were run off in quick succession. Little Miller, sprinting his hardest all the way, lest he should suffer his customary fate of being beaten out in the very last stride, won the second heat handily in ten seconds; Harvey captured the third, almost as easily as the Kid had taken his, and in the same time, ten and two fifths; while Flynn, the champion, maintained his right to the title by winning the last heat of the trials in commanding style, covering the distance in ten and one fifth, and looking back over his shoulder at the finish, with plenty of speed in reserve.

Then followed the half-hour's intermission before the final struggle. The boys walked over to the motor, to find Murray hard at work giving the Kid a final rubdown; then, since he assured them there was nothing they could do to help, they returned to the field,

The Race

and spent the remainder of the time walking about, listening to the predictions on the final heat. In general, it was still Flynn's name that was heard on all sides, but in the betting-ring itself the odds gradually shifted until they stood at even money, Flynn against the field. Clearly there were those among the "wise ones" who looked with favor on the chances of some one beside the champion. So quickly did the minutes pass that almost before they realized it the boys found the crowd once more hurrying back to the stand, and the four contestants in the final heat had taken their positions at the head of the stretch. On the extreme left was Harrington, his running-suit of white contrasting sharply with the sombre black of the champion, who held the next position in the line. In the third lane Miller's scarlet showed vividly, and on the extreme right was Harvey, with the maple leaf on his breast. As they stood waiting, the spectators could hear the starter's voice borne toward them on the breeze. "Ready—your marks—*set!*" and then, in the one trembling fraction of a second which intervened, they saw Flynn's figure spring forward from his

The Camp at Sea Duck Cove

marks and in the same instant the pistol cracked, too late for the error to be rectified, and the race was on. Flynn, tricky and experienced, had taken the desperate chance which always lies open to the unscrupulous sprinter, and, outguessing Rogers, had jumped just as the starter's finger pressed the trigger, and had "beaten the gun" a full yard. There was a shout from the crowd, partly of triumph from those whose money was wagered on the champion, partly of disappointment from the more sportsmanlike among the gathering, who were anxious to see the race decided on its merits alone. But a moment later all sounds, whether of joy or displeasure, were hushed as the four racers sped forward toward the goal. Nor was the contest to be decided wholly on Flynn's daring evasion of the rules. Harvey, indeed, always a slow starter, found the added handicap too much to be overcome, but Miller, getting away with a splendid burst of speed, soon overhauled the champion, and at thirty yards the red jersey showed a full two yards to the good, while Harrington, perhaps unnerved by the unexpectedness of Flynn's stratagem, failed to settle to his stride as quickly as usual,

The Race

and was an equal distance behind Flynn. At forty yards, and at fifty, the little Southerner retained his lead and suddenly there burst from the crowd a mighty shout, "Miller! Miller wins!"

There seemed good reason, indeed, for the cry, for Miller was running the race of his life. Nor did he resign an inch of his advantage without a struggle. At seventy yards he was still well in the lead, and mingled with the shouts of encouragement from his supporters, there arose a burst of execrations from those angry gamblers who had wagered their money on the champion. "Come on, Flynn!" they screamed. "Come on, you dog! Run, you quitter, run!"

Flynn heard them, and the words bit deep. If he had been running a "crooked" race, where he was meant to lose, he would have smiled at the uproar, but this was altogether different. He was running to win; his prestige and his value to Slattery hung in the balance, and though he had run fast before, he leaped forward now as a race-horse answers to the spur, and at eighty yards he was at Miller's side.

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The din from the stand was something terrific. To the champion's ears it came as the sweetest of music; it was for him that they were shouting; for him, "Rocket" Flynn, the fastest sprinter in America; and then, in the next moment, like a flash of lightning, he was disillusioned. Scores of people, indeed, were still calling his name, but louder and louder swelled the roar, "Harrington! Harrington! Harrington! Come on, Kid, come on! The Kid wins! Harrington!"

Not until the last ten yards had the spectators awakened to the struggle the Kid was making. At the very start of the race he had scarcely done himself justice, but from the thirty-yard mark on, no sprinter in the world could have bettered his showing. Inch by inch, foot by foot, his quick, nervous stride closed the gap between himself and the leaders, and now, ten yards from the tape, he had left Miller behind and was on even terms with the champion. Yet the race was not over there; as Murray had said, no man running against "Rocket" Flynn could look for any "cinch." Stride for stride, shoulder to shoulder, neither gaining on the other, they sped on, until with one

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supreme effort the Kid fairly hurled himself at the tape, and in the marvellous time of nine and three fifths seconds, swept past the line, a winner. A champion was dethroned. Flynn's star had set, and Harrington's had arisen. The Kid had his revenge.

CHAPTER VII

THE MEN ON THE ISLAND

THE hours, the days, and the weeks passed quietly and pleasantly at Sea Duck Cove. Harry, spending his time half in shooting and fishing, half in leisurely siestas on the broad piazza, grew steadily stronger and more rugged, and soon the dreaded nightmares of examination papers and quarter-mile runs became things of the past. Dick, hard at work from morning till night, in his own language "slept like a log, ate like a horse, and hauled pots like all get out," until he was as sturdy and wiry as a racer going to the post; and even old man Hutchins said of him, "Dick, you're as tough as those fellers down to the westward, beyond the Neck, and if the good Lord ever made anything tougher than them, why, you've got to show me; I never seen the beat of 'em in all my days."

Contrary to the boys' expectations, Murray

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and the Kid did not at once take leave of the beach. On the contrary, they returned, after the race, bringing a companion with them, a silent, keen-eyed man, whom Murray introduced as "Bill Harris, an old pal of mine. He's going to stay with us a little while till his health gets good."

The boys, however, found it hard to discover that there was anything wrong with Mr. Harris's health. For some days they saw nothing of him, and then, one morning, he appeared at the house, a huge telescope under his arm.

"I've come," he announced, "to ask a favor of you boys. I'm interested in surveying, and I want to make my observations from some high place along the shore. Your rocks here are just about the thing, and if I won't annoy you I should consider it a great favor to be allowed to use them."

Harry assented willingly enough, and for some time Mr. Harris came regularly, and remained all day on the rocks, snugly tucked away among the ledges, his eye glued to the end of his glass. After a week of this, as the boys sat on the piazza, one night, before turn-

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ing in, Dick began to speculate as to what the stranger's business really was.

"What do you make of this man, Harry?" he asked. "I've taken an awful dislike to him myself. Do you notice how carefully he comes snooping around every day? And how he goes sneaking down among the rocks? And how he's always hidden when you go looking for him? He reminds me of one of the sharpshooters you read about in the war, only I don't suppose he'll ever kill any one with a spyglass."

"Why," Harry returned, "I don't know what to think. I believe Murray's a good fellow, and I like the Kid, and so I rather accepted this man as a friend of theirs. But I don't take much stock in this telescope business myself. I guess the amateur surveyor story is a fake, all right. What's your theory, Dick?"

"Oh, I haven't what you'd call a theory," Dick answered, "but I can only see one place that he'd keep his old glass pointed at, all day long, and that's the Island. And if he's spying on the Johnson crowd, why, I think it's a pretty mean trick. And I should think



MR. HARRIS CAME REGULARLY AND REMAINED ALL DAY

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you'd ask him, point-blank, what he thinks he's celebrating, anyway."

"I'd hate to do that," Harry returned, "and it can't be that he's watching the Island, Dick. What on earth would he find there to interest him. They're the most humdrum lot I ever struck — have n't energy enough even to tend their lobster-pots decently, and to see them going shooting is enough to make you smile. They can't ever manage to get set in a good place, and they don't appear to give a darn whether they get anything or whether they don't. But they seem like a pretty nice crowd, just the same, and if this chap is trying to spy on them, why, as you say, I think we ought to stop it. But it must be something else, I think. Perhaps he's an inspector, after these fellows that sell short lobsters. He can't have anything on the Johnsons. They're all right."

Their relations, indeed, with the campers on the Island had been wholly pleasant. Harry had one day miscalculated his supply of gasoline, and they had found themselves broken down, a short distance from the Johnsons' home, and had rowed ashore for aid. The old man had been most cordial, for, on seeing

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them putting into the sheltered cove on the sou'west side of the Island, he had come hurrying down from the house to meet them, and had fitted them out with a can of gasoline, in short order. They had had a long talk with him, and had found him a man of education and refinement, a great traveller, well versed in all that was going on in the world — able to talk poets and novelists with Harry, and athletes and pugilists with Dick. He was in rather poor health, he told them, and had come to the Island for a rest, while his three sons had been possessed of the idea that they could make money out of fishing and shooting. The old gentleman, however, acknowledged, with a humorous shrug of his shoulders, that they had failed to make good in this direction, but had none the less enjoyed their summer, and would be sorry to leave. Big Ben, the eldest son, had proved surly and uncommunicative; the other two boys, Tom and Arthur, good-natured and inoffensive enough, but with little desire to take the initiative in anything, and much given to staying in the house, instead of putting in their time in the open air. And thus the idea

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of the mysterious Mr. Harris spending whole days watching the Johnsons through a telescope seemed so utterly absurd that the boys were rather disposed to question whether or not he was really in his proper senses. Yet there was something in his manner and the glance of his eye which seemed wholly to disprove this theory, and one evening, as he passed the house on his way home, Harry hailed him, and asked him to come in. He complied readily enough, and when he had seated himself in comfort in the hammock, Harry came frankly to the point.

"Look here, Mr. Harris," he said, "I don't mind your using our rocks for surveying purposes, and you can keep on coming here as long as you like. But I want to ask you a plain question, and I hope you won't be offended. *Are* you surveying, or is that just a way of expressing yourself. Isn't it really something else that you're after?"

For a moment or two Harris made no reply. "Well," he answered at length, "you've asked a plain question, as you say, and I'll give you a plain answer. In one sense of the word, I *am* surveying, and in another sense,

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I'm not. That is, I'm not surveying, in the technical sense. I'm observing things, that's all."

Harry nodded. "Thanks," he said; "that was what we thought. And now we'd like to know whether you're just observing things in general, or any person or persons in particular."

This time Harris did not hesitate. "'Persons in particular' is right," he answered briefly.

"And those persons," broke in Dick, "are the Johnsons, who live over on the Island."

In his eagerness, his tone, perhaps, sounded somewhat too much like that of a lawyer cross-examining a witness. Harris glanced at him none too pleasantly. "I did n't say that," he returned.

"No," Dick retorted, "but it's so, is n't it? I guess you can't deny it —"

But Harry, far more business-like and cool, broke in, "Oh, come, Dick, that's not the word to use. There's no question of denying anything. We're simply asking Mr. Harris some questions, and he can answer them or not, as he sees fit. Probably he'll tell us

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whether or not it is the Johnsons that he's been watching."

Harris nodded again. "Yes," he responded, even more shortly than before, "it is."

There was a silence, and then Harry spoke again. "Well, this is how we feel about it," he said; "it does n't seem to us that we want to have our rocks used for any such purpose as that, and so we're going to ask you to make your observations from some other point. We don't wish to be disobliging, but we don't like the idea, that's all."

Mr. Harris meditated. "All right," he said finally; "I don't know that I blame you, and now that I know how you feel about it, I promise you that I won't intrude again. But if you have no objections, now that we're on the subject, I'd like to ask you boys a question or two myself."

"Sure," Harry responded promptly, "fire away."

And after a moment's pause, Harris asked, "How many times, altogether, do you suppose you've been on the Island this summer?"

Harry considered. "Oh, I guess about a dozen," he answered, "is that right, Dick?"

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Dick nodded. "Just about," he agreed, "more, rather than less, I should think. About a dozen or fifteen times, altogether."

"I see," said Harris thoughtfully, — "a dozen or fifteen times. And how often do you suppose you've been inside the house?"

There was a silence. "Why —" Dick began, and then stopped again.

And it was Harry who finally answered in his stead, "Well, you see, I don't think we ever *were* inside the house, that I remember. It just seemed to happen so, you know."

Harris nodded. "Yes, I know," he assented somewhat dryly; and then continued, "Was the old man pretty cordial, all these different times?"

"He couldn't have been more so," said Harry, eager to vindicate his friend.

And Dick chimed in, "That was why we never got as far as the house. Mr. Johnson always came down to the beach to meet us. He was as nice to us as a man could be. Why, I remember one day when we were after a drink of water, and were going up to the house to get it, he would n't hear of it at all. He made us sit still and rest ourselves in that

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little grove down near the beach, and he went up himself and got the jug, and brought it down to us."

"I see," said Harris, again, "he must be a very nice old gentleman. And are the boys just as pleasant? Have you seen much of them?"

Harry shook his head. "The two younger ones don't give you much of a chance to see 'em," he replied; "they're always sticking around the house, so we don't know them much of any. And the big chap — well, he's around enough, but, to be honest about it, we haven't a great deal of use for him. He's the grouchy kind; seems to have a grudge against every one he meets. We haven't cultivated him much."

Harris nodded in silence. "You're very good to answer all these questions," he said, "especially as I don't know that I have any real right to be asking them. I'll only bother you with one more. How much longer are they going to stay?"

Harry shook his head. "I don't know," he answered, "but I should imagine it would only be a little while now. It must be pretty

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cold over there, in that old house, by this time."

"It is," struck in Dick, "the old gentleman told me so, the other day. He was asking me how soon we expected any big storms, and I thought he did n't seem very much pleased at the prospect. I guess he'd like to be getting back to town."

Something in his answer seemed to interest their questioner. "So he asked you about storms, did he?" he repeated. "I don't suppose you can remember just how the subject happened to come up?"

Dick pondered. "Well, no, I can't," he replied. "I got the impression, as I say, that he was scared. I remember his asking me if there was any danger of their being cut off from the mainland, and whether a boat could get across to them, with provisions, if the storm should be a long one. And I told him that I did n't know anything about it myself, but that I understood from the people who had seen such times that in a good lively blow a boat could n't get across, for love or money. That was about all, I think; we began to talk about something else then."

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Once more something in this commonplace information seemed to interest Harris. "H'm," he said, "so he was asking you about storms. And he was afraid of being cut off from the mainland. Poor old gentleman! I wonder why he stays there, if he's so nervous. Well, I must get along to supper, boys. Thank you for telling me what you have, and I won't bother you any more with my spyglass. I'm glad you were so straightforward about it. It's the best way."

He rose, and started to take his leave, but at the piazza steps he turned, speaking in a tone more serious than he had hitherto used. "Just two little matters to remember, boys," he said. "First of all let's regard this conversation as wholly confidential. If you should repeat anything of what I've been saying, you might have to face pretty serious consequences some day. So for the present, kindly give me the benefit of any doubt, you may have about me, and don't say a word to any one about what I've been doing. I'll tell you now that I'm no trouble-maker; I wish no harm to anybody who's managing to behave himself. If I'm spying on people, it's because I have a reason

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for doing so. And just one thing more — a little piece of friendly advice. However much you may like the Johnsons, try to keep away from them for the next week or so — especially if we get a big storm. That's all. Good-night," and he was gone.

Left alone, the boys stared at each other in bewilderment. "Well, I'll be darned," exclaimed Dick; "now, what do you know about that, Harry?"

Harry looked thoughtful. "There's something up, evidently," he answered. "I rather think I like Harris better than I did. He seems on the square to me. I never thought of it before, but is n't there something queer about their not inviting us up to the house? I think perhaps he's right about that. But what on earth did he mean about the big storm? I didn't see any sense in that. Did you?"

Dick shook his head. "Of course I did n't," he responded; "I don't see any sense to anything he says. He's a snooping old mischief-maker, that's all he is. What does he want to bother the Johnsons for? They're all right."

"Well, I think they are too," returned

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Harry ; and yet, no later than the next day, they were to hear more of the men on the Island, and this time from a wholly different source.

They had gone out in the dory, after lunch, to haul Dick's string of lobster-pots. The October afternoon was calm and clear, yet there was something curious about the day as well. The sun blazed down scorchingly on the Bay, with a heat like midsummer. The water around them was without a ripple, and Harry, peering over the stern as he shut off the power for the last lobster-trap in the line, could see far down in the cool green depths ; yet out on the Island, and on the reefs beyond, they could watch the sea break lazily, with a curl of foam, over the sunken rocks and the cliffs which lined the shore.

Dick, as he grasped the buoy and began to haul in on the line, stopped for a moment to gaze about him. "Mighty funny day, Harry," he said ; "makes you feel as if something were going to happen, and you didn't know what."

Harry nodded. "Yes, it is queer ; it's what they call a 'weather-breeder,' around

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these parts. Means that there's a storm coming, pretty soon. Here's Hutchins, heading in from the Island now. We'll hail him, and ask him what he thinks about it."

"Good idea," returned Dick; "I wish we *would* get something in the way of a blow. It would mean a dandy flight of ducks, for one thing, and it would make the lobsters crawl, too. I don't believe I've done better than pay expenses this week. Look at what we've done to-day."

And, indeed, the eight or ten small shellfish in the bottom of the boat scarcely gave the impression of great wealth. Dick hauled the last trap over the side, disgustedly threw away the crabs clinging to the half-eaten bait, slipped on a couple of fresh cod-heads, slid the trap overboard again, and stood watching Hutchins's dory, as she approached, her high bow cutting the water like a knife, the white foam dividing and slipping smoothly away on either hand.

As he drew near them, Harry waved to him, and the old man stooped and shut off his power. "Well," he hailed, as the dory drew alongside, and Dick reached out and grasped

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her rail, "how they comin' fur ye to-day. Gettin' rich quick?"

Dick shook his head ruefully. "Not much," he returned. "Are n't getting rich at all — quick or any other way. Lucky to be paying expenses, even. We were wondering if we were going to have a weather change, to help us out. Does n't it look like it to you?"

Hutchins nodded. "'Course it does," he responded, "we're goin' to git a change almighty quick. I'd think so, anyway, from the looks o' things, but when my old shoulder gits to twitchin' and jumpin' the way she has the last two days, then I don't *think* about it at all: I *know*, fur sartin. This is a reg'lar weather-breeder, this is. Within twenty-four hours we're a-goin' to have a devil of a breeze from the sou'west; you just watch out an' see if we don't."

He cocked his eye at the brazen sky overhead, and chewed methodically on his plug of tobacco.

"Well," said Dick hopefully, "that's going to stir up the lobsters, is n't it? And make good shooting, too?"

The old man nodded. "You get a good

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strong blow," he answered, "an' it's bound to make the fishin' good. An' as to ducks, now, I'll tell you boys somethin' you don't know" — he lowered his voice mysteriously. "I was talkin' to-day with Ed Stewart, way offshore by the tree ground, an' he says the whole Bay, up beyond the Neck, is just chock-a-block with fowl. Great rafts of 'em, he says, been comin' in there an' beddin' for a week. An' the wind, as you boys know, has been all east an' nothe-east, an' powerful light at that. Well, now, if we git an old son of a gun of a rip-snorter from the sou'west, there ain't but one thing to it. Them ducks is goin' to git up an' dust out, right on that change o' wind. An' I tell you, boys, if you're anxious to git a good shoot, you watch the weather dretful close to-night an' to-morrer. When she strikes, she'll strike quick, an' them birds is goin' to hike it for the south, fast as they can go. Why, I remember a day like that, away back forty years ago, when she breezed sou'west after a calm, an' my father an' me, we laid just a berth to windward o' the Island. Jiminy crick-eter, but did n't they come. An' what easy gunnin' it was. We a-layin' there, an' dottin'

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it into 'em, an' lettin' the dead ones float ashore on the Island. We killed forty-nine by twelve o'clock, an' give it up. An' that's just the kind of a day you might git to-morrer, too."

He stooped to throw on his power, then suddenly straightened up again. "By ginger, where's my memory goin'?" he cried, "what else do you s'pose Ed told me, boys? There's a what-you-may-call-'em — you know what I mean — mixed in with a big flock o' black skunkheads, over there in the Bay. Fust time they've seed one here for twenty years. Four or five o' the boys tried to shoot him, but couldn't come nigh enough. If you could only git him, Dick, for your college friends at home, you'd have a fancy price for that feller — maybe fifty or a hundred dollars, I reckon."

Both boys looked puzzled. "A — what did you say it was?" asked Harry.

The old man frowned, evidently not liking to admit that he did not know the name, yet not quite daring to attempt it. "You know," he replied; "one o' them fellers that ought to be black, but ain't. He's white as a snow owl, this chap is, so Ed says. Looks almighty

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pretty, in with the rest o' them black cusses. Just as white as snow."

By this time the boys had grasped his meaning, and Dick's eyes gleamed with excitement. "An albino," he cried, — "an albino surfscoter. By gracious! that would be great—to get a bird like that. But I don't suppose there's one chance in a thousand we could."

The old gunner shook his head. "No, I reckon not," he replied; "an' then, some folks thinks it's bad luck to shoot one o' them fellers, anyway. They say they're a kind o' spirit-duck, an' there's some meanin' to 'em comin' around. I guess, on the whole, I would n't figure out to shoot him, if I was you. There ain't no need huntin' trouble; it'll come all right, 'thout our lookin' for it."

Dick laughed. "Oh, nonsense," he said good-humoredly; "it's just a freak of nature that makes an albino. There's something, you know, that's in the egg, that colors the feathers when the bird is hatched. And once in a great while that gets left out, and then you have an albino. That's all there is to that. There's no spirit business to it, Mr. Hutchins."

But the old man only looked half convinced.

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"Well, I would n't take no chances," he repeated; "it's easy enough to get into trouble, these days."

Harry, knowing the old man as he did, divined that something lay back of his words. "What's the matter, Jim?" he asked; "is there really trouble coming?"

The old man frowned, and when he replied, it was to ask, and not to answer, a question. "Ever haul another man's lobster-pots?" he queried.

Both boys looked indignant. "Of course not," they answered in the same breath; and Harry added, "You don't mean to say you think we'd do anything like that, do you?"

Hutchins shook his head. "No, you don't understand," he said; "I asked the question wrong. I meant, did you ever haul one for fun, to see what it looked like. I have, and I'll do it again now."

He looked over toward the Island, to see if anyone might be watching, for to haul another man's pots, even for purposes of innocent investigation, was a somewhat risky proceeding. The blue-and-white buoy of one of the Johnsons' string lay only twenty yards away.

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"Hold on to my boat, boys," he said, and throwing on his power, he churned alongside of the buoy, and hauled up the trap. "There," he said grimly, "what think of them for fishermen?"

The boys looked in surprise. The pot was overgrown with moss and rockweed, unbaited, the wire rusted off short in its socket. In the knitted head, at the end, was a great gaping hole. The pot would not have caught a lobster in a hundred years.

"Well," asked the old man, "pretty good condition, hey?"

Dick, as usual, hastened to the defence of his friends. "Well, what of it?" he demanded; "I've got some pots that aren't in the best of shape, either. Their whole string isn't that way, I guess."

The old man grinned. "You guess, hey!" he retorted briskly; "well, I don't guess nothin' about it. I *know*. I've hauled their whole blame string, one or two a day, early mornin's an' late evenin's, an' they're just as bad as this one, the whole of 'em. An' yet the big cuss there, he keeps on haulin', just as industrious as a feller can be. Now, what's

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the explanation o' foolishness like that, if they ain't somethin' wrong. Not doin' it for their health, be they?"

Dick looked puzzled. "May be they are," he replied at length, though without conviction, "you can't tell. Perhaps they've got plenty of money, and they're just gunning and fishing for the fun of it. Lobsters haven't been any good lately, anyway. When they get to crawling again, probably the Johnsons will fix up their traps."

Hutchins stubbornly shook his head. "If they've got all the money they want," he objected, "why would they be livin' out on that God-forsaken island? Why wouldn't they have a nice cottage on the mainland, same as the rest of you folks? No, sir, they're some mighty funny things about that crowd. I was talkin' about 'em the other night with this fellow Harris that's stayin' at Murray's, an' we both of us got an idee —"

"Oh, come," Dick interrupted, "now I see what the trouble is. If you've been talking with Harris, no wonder you've got a little foolish. He's crazy; that's all that's the matter with him; apart from that, he's

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all right. He's got the Johnsons on the brain."

But the old man only shook his head again. "Oh, no, he ain't crazy," he replied, "not by a jugful, he ain't. Maybe he's got a sight more sense about these fellers than some other folks has, Dick, my boy. An' don't you forget that, my son."

Dick flushed. "Well, if I were as uncharitable as some people —" he began.

And Harry, the peaceable, never fond of an argument, saw only one way to divert his friends from the discussion. "Never mind the Johnsons, Dick," he cut in; "I want to find out about these ducks. Do you suppose, Jim, it would be the best way to gun them where we usually do, or should you think, as long as we know where they're bedded, it would be better to go over to the Neck. Did you ever gun them over there?"

Hutchins nodded. No subject on earth, to his mind, could compare for a moment with duck shooting, as a matter of real interest and importance, and his attention, as Harry had hoped, was at once withdrawn from the topic of the men on the Island. "Sure, I've gunned

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'em over there," he answered, "an' I'll tell you just how it is. When you go outside, you take more chances of gettin' fooled, an' you run more chances of hittin' things big. 'Cause why. Over here in the Cove the fowl fly more reg'lar ; you can tell about where they're goin' to strike, dependin', of course, on how the wind is, an' how fresh she blows. But over there by the Neck, they got the whole blamed ocean to blaze for. If they happen to strike kind of a line o' flight, an' come along just so, flock after flock, why, then, you got a great show to pile 'em up. Father an' me, we gunned 'em that way, once, in a southeaster, about three berths outside the Island, gittin' the Spindle over Jim Morris's barn, an' they certainly did come handsome. Seventy-two of 'em, we stopped that day, an' the wind a screechin' so we couldn't git no more'n half o' what we knocked down. Yes, sir, it might pay you, an' then again it might not. No tellin'. But you watch the weather close, an' when she strikes, then you be somewheres, anyway, an' you'll git some fowl. Well, I must be steamin' along in to supper, I s'pose. See you again, boys."

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He stooped, cranked his wheel, and started his dory for home.

Harry turned to Dick. "What do you say?" he asked, "Shall we go in too?"

"Not unless you want to," Dick answered; "I'll tell you what I'd like to do. I'd like to take a run over toward the Neck, and see what it looks like, out that way, in case we want to try gunning there to-morrow. It's a dandy evening, too; it seems a shame to go ashore just yet."

Harry nodded. "Sure thing," he replied; and in a twinkling he had started the engine, and they were making their way over toward the Neck.

Once outside of the Island they could appreciate the force of what Hutchins had told them. Across from them, five or six miles away, lay the Neck, and it was a simple matter to see that a flock of ducks, starting from that point to leave the Bay, had, as the old man had expressed it, "the whole blamed ocean to blaze for."

"I don't believe," Harry observed, "that I think much of this place. Seems as if we had a better chance inshore of the Island."

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Dick nodded. "Yes, it does," he answered, "if we should set our decoys here. But I wonder why we couldn't go way over to the Neck itself. These ducks that are bedded there must all come out pretty near the same place, to start with, and then I suppose they begin to separate and choose different lines of flight. But I should think, if it didn't blow too hard, we could go over to the Neck and have some great shooting. Shouldn't you?"

"I don't see why not," replied Harry, "it sounds like a mighty good scheme to me. We could try it, anyway."

He turned the boat, as he spoke, and they swung back toward the Island, passing close under the northeast shore. They could see the little beach, and beyond it the tough, weather-beaten trees, growing down almost to the water's edge. On either side were the cliffs, and presently Dick pointed to a deep cleft in the rocks, just to the eastward of the beach.

"Say Harry," he observed, "if we were kids now, wouldn't that be the place to play pirates, or castaways, or some game like that. That's a good enough cave to suit any one."

Harry looked in the direction indicated, and

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saw a big yawning fissure in the cliffs, running back so far that they could not see where it ended, roofed over and protected from the weather by tons of solid rock. He nodded. "Yes, that's all right," he answered; and then, with a laugh, "I suppose, now, if Harris were here, he'd want to land and begin exploring. He'd probably think it was full of buried treasure, or smuggled gold, or something else like that."

Dick laughed, but immediately became grave again. "Well, I don't care, Harry," he said, "it makes me tired to see people as suspicious as Harris and Hutchins are. I don't want to meet a nicer man than old Johnson. He's always cheerful, always pleasant, and he has fine ideas about everything — religion, you know, and all that. I can't see what they keep knocking him for. I think they ought to be ashamed of themselves."

Harry considered. "Well, I don't know, Dick," he said thoughtfully. "I don't suppose there's anything really wrong with the Johnson outfit, but yet there's a grain of truth in what Harris and Jim say. If these folks were rich, they probably would have taken a cottage

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on the shore. And if they were just camping out where they are for the fun of it, I should think they 'd amuse themselves more than they do — go boating and swimming and shooting, and things like that. But they keep awfully close to the house, most of the time, all but the big chap. And if he keeps on hauling a string of lobster-pots that are all rotted to pieces, as Jim says he does, why, that seems a little funny, too. I think the whole business is queer, myself. Probably there's nothing wrong about them, but they're certainly eccentric — no one could deny that. If they were just idle, ignorant squatters, it would n't be so hard to understand. But the old gentleman is a man of education. Why, he can quote Shakespeare and Byron by the hour, without mis-calling a word. Really, Dick, the whole thing is a little queer."

As he finished speaking, they had circled the Island, and were skirting along the southwest side. Dick, looking shoreward, for a moment made no reply; then with apparent irrelevance, he turned to Harry and asked, "Look here, have you got any sporting blood?"

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Harry nodded. "Sure," he answered, "full of it. Why, what's up now?"

For reply Dick picked up the water jug from the bottom of the dory, removed the stopper, and allowed the contents to trickle out into the sea. "By gracious, Harry," he exclaimed, as the last drop vanished over the side, "I've got an awful thirst. And we haven't a drop of water aboard. Wonder where we could get some. Do you know?"

Harry smiled. "You think you're smart, don't you, Dick?" he answered; "I suppose it's the inside of the house you want to see."

Dick nodded. "That's what," he answered, "they won't be around the beach as late as this, and we'll march right up to the front door, so they'll have to invite us in. It is n't seeing the inside of the house that I care about, but I want to be able to go over and see that Harris chap to-night, and tell him what we've done. I want to put a stop to the mean little insinuations he keeps making. I call it a mighty dirty trick."

Harry grinned. "You've certainly got it in for Harris," he observed. "Well, come along. I don't care what happens to us. I guess

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they 're not cannibals, anyway. Let 's give it a try, and see how we come out."

He headed the dory for the narrow entrance to the landlocked Cove, and a few moments later her bow had grounded on the slope of the beach. They stepped ashore, and then suddenly Harry, with a little exclamation, half of enjoyment, half of annoyance, pointed up the path.

"Well for the love of Mike," he cried, "talk about your six-eyed sleuths. You can't lose the old gentleman, Dick." And Dick, glancing toward the house, saw Johnson's active figure advancing briskly to meet them.

He greeted them with the utmost cordiality. "Well, well," he exclaimed, "this is an unexpected pleasure. Rather late in the day for cruising, is n't it? Can I do anything for you? Broken down? Anything wrong?"

Dick held up the empty water jug. "We're always bothering you," he said apologetically; "we've been careless enough to run out of water again, and I was so thirsty I thought I could n't wait until I got ashore. I hope we're not troubling you too much."

Johnson smiled his benevolent smile. "Of course you 're not," he said heartily; "one of

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the pleasures of life is the opportunity of helping others. Sit here and rest, and let me fill it for you."

He extended his hand, as he spoke, but Dick, summoning all his courage, retained his hold on the jug. "No, no," he cried, "we can't ask you to wait on us like that, Mr. Johnson. You stay here with Harry, and let me run up to the house and fill it myself. It won't be any trouble, really; we're not tired in the least."

But the old gentleman was not to be outdone, either in politeness or firmness. His hand closed tightly on the neck of the jug. "I could n't think of it," he answered; "you must permit me to play the host, even in this somewhat remote spot. And, unfortunately, there is another reason, also, why I should prefer to go myself. Arthur — my youngest boy — has been sick in the house all day with a severe headache. He has been subject to them ever since we first came here. And of course I am anxious to have everything as quiet for him as I can. It is a misfortune. If he only had the strength of my oldest son, I could hardly complain. Ben does n't know the mean-

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ing of sickness — he enjoys perfect health. But I am delaying you. Permit me, please —” And relieving Dick of the burden of the jug, he started for the house.

The boys sat waiting for his return in silence. It was not long before he reappeared, and as he neared them, they saw that he was carrying not only one jug, but two. “So that you may have one always in reserve,” he explained politely, “I am delighted to have seen you. Pray come again.”

The interview was evidently at an end. Neither of the boys spoke until they were well clear of the Island, and then Harry asked, “Well, what do you think now?”

“Think!” repeated Dick, “why, I think just as I always have, that this talk of Harris’s is all silly nonsense. If Johnson’s son has been sick all summer, why, of course that explains everything. He would n’t want people coming to the house. And he was mighty good to give us that extra jug of water.”

Harry chuckled. “I’ve been wondering about that,” he replied; “somehow, I have an idea that may have been intended as a delicate hint. And you’ll notice one thing, Dick.

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Headache or no headache, we did n't get into the house. I'm really beginning to side with Harris and Jim. I think these folks are rather a queer lot."

Dick did not answer, but presently, shading his eyes with his hand, he rose, and looked behind them at the Island. And as he looked, he wondered. Was there something wrong with this strange family, after all? For the first time, he began to doubt. And then suddenly he turned to Harry with a laugh. "Confound you," he cried, "you'll have me as bad as the rest of you soon. You and Harris and Hutchins are three victims of the same disease — too much poetic imagination. — But let's get back to real life, for a change. What do you say we do about to-morrow?"

Harry considered. "Well," he answered, "I'd like to take a chance on the albino; I'd like to get even a look at him. Why don't we set the alarm, and if it's the right kind of a morning, we'll go over to the Neck and try our luck. We'll learn something about the place, anyway, and we might strike it big, as Jim says. I think we ought to try it."

Dick nodded. "I'd like to," he assented;

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"I keep thinking of that albino myself. I never saw one outside of a museum. He must look great, in with a flock of black ones. Just think of the contrast."

"Queer, is n't it," hazarded Harry, "about the fishermen and their ideas of bad luck. Imagine an albino being regarded as something in the spirit line. I don't think I should worry much if he came within a fair gunshot. I should let drive, and shoot as straight as I could. Well, there 's the mooring ahead, Dick. Our cruise is ended for to-day."

After their supper they came out on the piazza to take a last look at the weather before turning in. It was still calm and quiet, and the stars shone down from a cloudless sky, but a broad, luminous ring encircled the moon. Dick pointed to it. "Sure sign, they say," he observed, "some kind of bad weather coming."

Harry nodded assent, and then looked out far over the Bay, to where, in the distance, the faint outline of the Island loomed up through the darkness. "Now, if we could only look into the old house," he said, "we 'd know more about our friends than we do. How do

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you bet on it, Dick? Are they mending lobster-pots, or are they planning to put to sea in their motor boat, with the Jolly Roger at the masthead?"

Dick laughed. "Oh, I guess we're getting excited about nothing," he responded, "the Johnsons are all right."

Yet if they could have seen through the walls of the old shanty, as Harry had suggested, they might have both looked and listened with more than ordinary interest, for they would have seen the old man and his three sons busily engaged in conversation, Arthur, the victim of the severe headache, luxuriously lighting a cigar, the other two boys pulling meditatively on their pipes.

"Well," the old man was saying, "they're ready at last, then. And I congratulate you, boys; you've done a first-class piece of work. I could n't better it myself, and as you know from the past, I'm not easily pleased. But this time I'm thoroughly satisfied. It's beautifully done."

Big Ben spoke up in answer. "Yes, that part's all right," he rejoined, "but there's the real job to be pulled off yet. And we

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ought to do it soon, and clear out. I thought we'd have this blooming island to ourselves, but it's turned out to be a regular health resort. Those two young chaps, and the runner and his pals, and old Foxy Grandpa there, with the whiskers — we ought to do the job, and get."

The old man nodded. "You're quite right, Ben," he returned; "it won't be long now. The first time that it storms so hard that no one can get to the Island, we'll finish in a night, and then, as soon as the weather clears, we'll take to the boat, and be gone. Things are coming our way, boys; we'll never regret the summer we've spent here. We'll look back on it some day as the best one of our lives."

CHAPTER VIII

A DAY WITH THE DUCKS

THE clock in Harry's sleeping-room marked the hour of half-past three, and on the instant the strident rattle of the alarm filled the room with its warning clamor. At once both boys awoke, yawning and stretching themselves before they finally mustered up their courage, tumbled sleepily out of bed, and stepped outside to investigate. A change had taken place in the aspect of the weather. It was no longer clear, but gray and overcast, and far away in the southwest a bank of clouds was gathering, each moment mounting higher and higher against the sky. There was no faintest sign of daylight, and the fresh breeze from the south soon drove them, shivering, back to the shelter of the house. By the warmth of the kitchen stove, they consulted.

"Well," Harry observed, without any very great enthusiasm, "I suppose it's the kind of

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day Hutchins told us about. I guess we ought to start."

Dick grinned at the half-heartedness of his tone, well knowing, from experience, that a shooting-trip, discussed with enthusiasm the night before after a good supper, and with a fire blazing on the hearth, may appear quite differently on the morning itself, with the chill of the early dawn benumbing sleepy brain and sluggish blood.

"Yes," he answered, "we'd better go, I think. We'll feel a little livelier when we've had a cup of coffee and a bite to eat. And I have an idea we'll get some ducks."

Half an hour later they had boarded the motor boat and had persuaded the engine to start. At first, she skipped a little, but finally, warming to her work, she drove them, with a steady *putt-putt-putt-putt*, straight onward toward the Neck, across the Bay. Harry was steering, while Dick busied himself with preparations for the day's work, stowing away guns, shells, and lunch-baskets, and clearing the lines on the decoys, so that they would run out smoothly and without delay as soon as the anchors should be tossed over the side.

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Gradually, as they left the Cove farther and farther behind them, their enthusiasm began to rise.

“Funny, isn’t it,” said Dick, “how there can be such a different feeling in the air, on different days. There’s an old fellow out home, who’s a dandy gunner, and he studies the weather just the way Hutchins does. In the fall, especially, he’s always looking for ‘a reg’lar gun day.’ There are different things that have to combine — the wind has to have east in it, I believe, and it has to be cloudy, and it has to be blowing a good breeze, and there are some other things, too, that I’ve forgotten. But when that day comes, it’s ‘a reg’lar gun day,’ and there’s always a flight of ducks. Somehow to-day makes me think of it. I’ve a feeling that we’re going to strike things right, and count ’em up in good style. Maybe we’ll get that albino, Harry. I was dreaming about him all night long.”

“Oh, sure,” Harry retorted, “we probably will. And while you’re shooting albinos, I’ll catch a couple of whales and an octopus, and shoot a polar bear. One’s just about as likely

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as the other, I guess. We'll be lucky if we get a sight of him, even."

"Yes," Dick assented, "that's so. Well, I'll bet we get some good shooting, just the same. — Jerusalem, Harry, look at that!"

Straight out of the darkness a great black line of wild fowl broke suddenly on their sight, flying low overhead. The rush and whistle of their wings filled the air, and in a twinkling they had vanished again into the gloom.

Dick had reached for his gun; then, realizing that his chance was gone, he laid it down again with a laugh. "Some speed there," he said, "good sign, though, to see 'em stirring as early as this."

"Yes, it is," Harry agreed, "that's what old Hutchins always says. When they're going before it's light, you can count on getting some shooting. And we're pretty nearly over there, too."

Before them appeared the low outline of the shore, and beyond, still further in shadow, rose the tall cliffs that marked the further boundary of the Bay. The breeze gradually freshened, the few faint stars which had struggled forth were blotted out again, and

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the sky became suffused with a dull, uniform grayish light. Another flock of ducks passed them, and then another, both travelling on the same line as the first. They seemed to round the bend of the Neck, and then to strike straight over toward the Cove.

“Look here, Dick,” Harry exclaimed, “is n’t this just what old Hutchins was talking about? He said, if you could only get in the line of flight, that was the time you’d have a big day. Why don’t we put our decoys out here, and take a chance? If we find they’re going somewhere else, we can shift, quick enough. But this looks mighty good to me.”

For answer, Dick bent down and made sure that the first decoy line was clear. “All right,” he assented, “head her up, and shut off your power, and we’ll set ’em out.”

Harry swung the dory’s head sharp around until she came head to the sea and wind, while Dick tossed the light anchor far out ahead, let the line run through his fingers, and then threw over the decoys. One after another he placed the four sets in order; then, working up to windward, they dropped their own anchor, and were ready for the day’s sport.

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Harry had loaded his gun, and Dick was making fast the anchor line, when suddenly a pair of ducks dropped out of the gloom, lit among the decoys, and then, instantly realizing their mistake, jumped again. Harry's gun leaped to his shoulder, and though his first barrel was discharged without effect, he fired his second just as the two birds crossed in the air, and at the report, both dropped into the water, stone dead, as if they had been struck by lightning.

Harry turned to Dick. "Oh, I don't know," he said, "talk about your crack shots. Some class to that, I should say."

Dick threw over the buoy. "I should say there was," he answered laughingly, "accidents will happen, Harry. We'd better go and pick 'em up, before another bunch—"

Harry's agonized whisper cut him short "Dick! Dick!" he called; "load up! load up! For Heaven's sake! Here's all creation coming."

Dick, without wasting a moment in looking around, dove for his gun, and fumbled hastily in his pockets for his shells. Loading as quickly as possible, he glanced up, just in

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time to see a huge flock bearing down upon them. As they reached the decoys, they sheered, and Dick could see from their plumage that they were all old birds, who knew the meaning of a boat and decoys as well as the gunners themselves. Yet in the gray of the dawn they had ventured too near, and at the same instant both boys rose to their feet and fired. "*Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!*" rang out the four reports; two birds fell dead, and another, evidently hard hit, scaled in a little further up to windward.

Reloading, Harry hastened to start the engine. "Say," he cried, "I guess we've struck that line of flight, all right. I bet we have a dandy day."

Dick nodded assent. In a moment they had picked up Harry's pair, which lay dead to leeward, and the two birds which they had killed from the flock, and then started in pursuit of the wounded duck, to windward of the decoys. The chase, however, was vain, for the crippled bird put up a vigorous fight for his life, diving constantly, and when he came to the surface, showing only his head above water before he disappeared again from sight. So that

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finally they lost him in the darkness, gave up the pursuit, and started back for their anchorage.

Yet their effort to capture the wounded duck was to result in disappointment. Half-way back to the decoys, Dick suddenly groaned. "Oh, gosh! Harry, just look there," and four big eider ducks, the glossy green-and-white plumage of the males looming up magnificently in the dull light of the morning, skimmed by and passed on, safely out of shot.

"Confound the luck!" cried Harry, "I never shot an eider. That's what we get for chasing that cripple."

"Well, I know," Dick answered, "but then of course it's the sportsmanlike thing to do. If you shoot a bird down, you've got to try to get him. That's only right."

"Yes," Harry assented, "I suppose that's so. I wonder, Dick, what becomes of all the crippled ducks, anyway."

"According to what Hutchins says," answered Dick, "quite a lot of them get well, and go on south again. And some of them are killed by the fishermen, out here in the Bay, and others go in on the marshes, and get

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picked up by hawks and owls. However you look at it, I'm afraid it isn't a very enviable lot. It always seems the most cruel part of shooting, to me."

As he finished speaking, they reached their anchorage again, and once more beheld a line of wild fowl coming toward them from the entrance of the Neck. Nor was there any cessation to the steady flight of ducks. All through the morning they streamed along, growing somewhat more wary, however, as the hours passed, while a lively bombardment from beyond the Neck made it clear to the boys that they were not the only gunners in the field. By ten o'clock they had killed twenty-seven, and then, for the next two hours, the flight slackened a little, and their shots were few and far between. Shortly after noon, however, the breeze increased, the sky became still cloudier and more threatening, and the ducks, as if anxious to press on to the southward without delay, recommenced their flight.

By four o'clock Dick took advantage of a lull in the shooting to count up their bag, and was thus busily engaged when Harry, looking up to windward and shading his eyes with his

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hand, asked suddenly, "Say, Dick, does n't the weather look awfully queer to you?"

Dick paused in his counting of the spoils. "Forty-one, forty-two —" he muttered to himself, then stopped, a big black whitewing in either hand, and gazed in his turn. "By gracious! it does look kind of funny," he acknowledged; "still, I don't thing anything could happen to us. This old boat could go almost anywhere, I suppose, if we put the hood on her. Next to Hutchins's dory, I believe she's about as good as they come. You don't want to stop shooting, do you, Harry? We never had a day like this before, and I don't believe we ever will again. Let's stay a little while longer, anyway."

Harry nodded, though he still kept his eyes on the curious-looking clouds gathering far up to the southwest of them. "All right," he said, "I don't care. I was just thinking it looked mighty squally, that was all. But as you say, I don't see how we can come to any harm."

Dick went on with his counting. "Fifty-seven," he announced at last, "and we've half an hour more daylight at least. We ought

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to get two or three more shots, I should think. Let's make it an even sixty."

For the moment, however, it seemed as though the ducks had finally ceased their flight. For ten minutes not a flock appeared, and then suddenly another great bunch swung into view, flying far inshore, along the curve of the beach, and moving slowly, as if wearied with their flight against the ever-freshening breeze. A few moments more and they had disappeared behind the bend, and the boys, for the hundredth time that day, crouched low in the dory, with guns cocked and in readiness, waiting for the vanguard of the flock to appear from behind the point. The seconds passed, and then, just as they were beginning to fear that the ducks had alighted for the night, they swept full into view, and at sight of them both boys gave a sudden gasp, and Dick felt his heart begin to pound quick and fast against his ribs. It was not the flock itself, though that was a splendid one, — some thirty or forty birds altogether, black skunk-heads, with a few grays mixed in, — but in the centre of the bunch, standing out in the most vivid contrast against the coal-black

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plumage of his companions, was a bird, pure white, and yet so like the others in size and shape, and in his flight, that there could be no question as to his identity — it was the albino of which they had heard so much — and the flock was heading straight for the decoys.

Slowly the ducks drew nearer. Plainly enough they were tiring ; the long line seemed almost to touch the water with their wings, and still, in the centre, like some king surrounded by his retinue, they could see the snow-white plumage of the bird they longed to capture. Gradually, there came a change in their direction.

As the wind increased, they seemed to turn more and more into the teeth of it, bearing away so far to the south that it became evident that, if they kept to their course, they would pass out of range. Both boys whistled vigorously, to attract their attention, but the birds kept on their way, without rising, and in a moment more were fairly abreast of them. Dick, crouching low in the bottom of the dory, never taking his eyes from the white duck in the centre of the flock, all at once bethought himself of the expedient which Hut-

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chins had told him to try, in a case where nothing else would do. Jerking his cap from his head, he waved it wildly in the air. For a moment there was no response, and then, on a sudden, two or three birds rose a little in the air, espied the decoys, hesitated for an instant, wavered, and turned. The remainder of the flock held to their course a second longer, then another bird left it, and another and another, until finally, with a rush, the whole bunch had swung and were following the leaders for the decoys.

Dick turned his head the veriest trifle. "Let all the rest go," he whispered; "pick the albino; he's the one we want. And let him come as far as he will. Don't fire too soon."

Harry nodded, his eyes fixed on the advancing flock. "Sure," he muttered; "let the others go. He's the one we want."

There was only a second or two left before the birds would be within shot. And then, all at once, either the sight of the boat tossing at anchor alarmed them, or their natural caution again asserted itself, for suddenly they wheeled, massed closely together, and once

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more swung off toward the south. Yet struggle as they might, the wind was sagging them down every moment toward the dory ; eighty yards — seventy — sixty — and as they reached the crucial point, where they could come no closer, Dick rose to his knees with a yell. "Give it to him, Harry," he cried, and in an instant both boys' guns were at their shoulders, and the scattered reports rang out, all four shots aimed at the albino, who still kept his place in the centre of the flock. Yet there followed no result such as they had hoped for. The bird in front of the albino, and the bird behind him, fell headlong, but the albino himself, after a slight swerve, as if some stray shot had reached him, kept on with his companions, apparently unharmed.

The boys sat gazing after the flock, as it receded in the distance. "Too bad ! too bad !" cried Harry ; "if they'd only come a little nearer." And he stooped to reload his gun.

Dick did not take his eyes from the gleam of white, now far off in the distance. He was still hoping against hope, for he had held fair on the albino with both barrels, and that momentary stagger had seemed to tell him that

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his shot had gone true to the mark. And just as he was giving up in despair, all at once, before his very eyes, the spot of white seemed to be separating from the mass of black. Could it be, he wondered? Was it possible? And an instant later he saw that it was true. The albino had altered his position with the flock, was falling behind, and gradually lowering toward the water. "Look, Harry, look!" he cried. "We did hit him, after all. Look there! Watch him now, and see if he goes in. It's getting so dark it's hard to see."

Through the blackness, against the background of dull gray clouds, they strained their eyes. Sure enough, the white bird was dropping, more and more rapidly each instant, and at last, as if relinquishing the struggle, he set his wings, and sweeping off to the west in a wide half-circle, finally struck the water with a mighty splash.

On the instant Dick leaped forward and hurled over the buoy. "We can get him," he cried, "if we can find him before it's too dark. Start your engine, Harry, and we're after him."

The next moment the chase began. But try

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as they would, they could catch no glimpse of their game, for the roughening water furnished them no such background as the sky had done. Dick stood erect on the dory's thwart, gripping an oar to steady himself, and glancing constantly to right and left as they swept along. But still there was no sign of the albino, and presently he called, "Keep her off a little, Harry. I think we've come far enough, but maybe we have n't calculated right on the wind and the tide. If he's started swimming out to sea, with this sou'west gale behind him, he'll travel along like the very old Nick."

Harry nodded, and obeyed. His whole heart and soul were in the chase, yet from his position in the stern of the dory, he had a better chance than his companion to observe the threatening change in the weather, and as he pointed the dory's head for sea, he could not help calling Dick's attention to the look of the sky to the south'ard of them. It was an angry sight. A solid wall of ink-black clouds, and beneath them twisting scuds of gray, skimming along at terrific speed. And hard as the wind was blowing, it was still increasing steadily every moment. But Dick, his mind

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fixed on the albino, only vouchsafed a hasty glance, and then turned to leeward again. "Oh, we'll be all right," he called; "she'll go through anything with the hood on her." And they dashed ahead, straight out to sea.

And now, with a fair tide, and the wind dead astern, the dory drove along like a race-horse, leaping wildly from crest to crest, and yawing so that Harry had all he could do to keep her on her course. For a couple of minutes they tore onward, and then, just as Harry, with another glance behind them at the oncoming squall, was on the point of turning the dory's bow for home, all at once a cry from Dick made him forget everything. "There he is!" Dick shrieked. "Port your helm, Harry! Hard down! Hard down! There he is! To the eastward! Look, Harry, look!"

Harry jammed down his helm, then glanced where Dick was pointing. And there, sure enough, was the albino, swimming ahead like lightning, evidently only slightly hurt, and determined to wage a gallant battle for his life. They bore swiftly down upon him, but while they were still some three or four gun-

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shots distant, he tried to fly, beating the water vainly with his wings; then, abandoning the attempt, dove instead, and was lost to sight.

Dick shook his head, frowning, as he looked up at the darkening sky. "He's pretty lively, Harry," he cried, "and the weather looks worse all the time. We've got to get him quick, if we're going to get him at all. Be ready to shut her off, now, when I tell you."

An instant later he raised his hand. "Far enough," he called; "stop her, Harry, and get your gun."

Harry shut off the switch, reached for his gun, and both boys stood ready, Harry looking to the west, Dick to the east, waiting for the crippled duck to reappear. Suddenly Harry laid down his gun, and stooped over the wheel. "There he is," he whispered, "way astern."

Sure enough the albino had outwitted them, diving in one direction, and then turning and swimming beneath the water in the other.

Dick whistled. "He's a smart one," he said, "an old-timer at the game. Never mind, though; we'll get him, before we're through."

Harry had no sooner started the engine

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than the duck dove again. This time Dick figured hastily on the probable direction which he would take, and, before they had reached the spot where he had disappeared, told Harry to throw off the power, and they came once more to a halt. For some moments they stood watching as before; then all at once Dick was startled by the sudden report of Harry's gun, followed by an exclamation of disappointment from his friend. He turned hastily, but could see no sign of the duck.

"Miss him?" he asked excitedly.

Harry nodded. "Confound it! yes," he replied; "he came up right close to us, but the second he saw the boat he went down again like a flash. I got a good look at him, too. He's a beauty — pure white, except for a few black feathers on his head. I'll bet I hit him. The shot seemed to get to him just as he went under. Maybe he'll come up dead."

"Maybe he will," Dick responded hopefully, but the seconds passed, and they could see no sign of the duck.

Suddenly Harry pointed to the south, with a quick exclamation of alarm. "Look at that, Dick," he cried; "we're going to get an awful

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squall. We ought to be starting away from here, quick."

Dick did not look around. Consumed with a desire to capture the albino, he still stood, gun in hand, peering around him into the gathering darkness. "Just a minute," he answered, "we can get him, Harry; just a minute more."

Harry grasped him by the shoulder, and gave him a shake. "Look, Dick!" he cried again; and as Dick unwillingly swung around, in an instant the albino, the chase, everything but their safety, was at once forgotten.

He made a quick dive for the hood. "Start your engine, Harry," he called, "quick as you can. Head her for shore."

For the moment the wind had abated, and the dory pitched and rolled on the oily heave of the sea. Yet trouble was clearly coming from the wicked-looking sky to the south. The background of angry black had mounted higher; underneath it the streamers and pennons of gray bore rapidly down upon them; and on shore, two miles away, a distant roaring sound, and column after column of swirling dust, marked the spot where the squall had already struck.

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"Where shall I head for, Dick?" Harry cried.

Dick cast a hasty glance around them. The Neck was a good two miles away, and if they failed to reach it, the prospect of being blown out to sea remained. Home was out of the question; the distance was too great for them to think of reaching it in safety. A mile to the sou'west, the Island loomed mistily against the background of the sky. If they could reach it, they would be safe. "The Island," he answered; "that's our best chance—I guess our only one."

In answer Harry swung the dory's head around, and their race with the storm began. Their boat was travelling as fast and well as she had ever done in her life, yet to the boys, straining their eyes through the blackness, she appeared barely to be crawling along, and compared with the advance of the wall of black, the distance seemed scarcely to diminish at all. They had covered perhaps half of their journey, when Dick, who had lowered the hood for the time being, for the sake of greater speed, hurriedly raised it again, and made everything fast in the strongest possible style.

A Day with the Ducks

“Here she comes, for fair,” he yelled, and the next instant, almost, as it seemed, without warning, the water ahead of them grew black as night, crowned with crest after crest of leaping white, like an army of soldiers advancing to battle. Then a wild, moaning roar, and the dory, rising straight into the air, hung for a moment motionless, as if she would have been hurled backward; then, as the wave passed, came crashing downward, and plunged straight ahead through the whirling tumult of the storm.

Whether she was making headway or not, it was impossible to tell, though this, indeed, was not the boys' first thought. “Will she weather it?” Harry cried, putting his lips close to Dick's ear, and Dick, assuming a courage that he did not feel, shouted back, “Sure. We're all right. She'll get us there—if nothing busts,” he added, an instant later, as a terrific wave broken over them, deluging the hood, sending a dozen buckets of water aft into the standing room, and for a moment threatening to stop the engine altogether.

For half an hour they fought their way onward, into the very teeth of the gale. Utter

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darkness surrounded them, and the wind, instead of diminishing, after the first wild burst seemed actually to increase in force as the minutes passed. Yet the dory bore herself gallantly, riding the seas in safety, or dashing the water from her hood in torrents, as she dove forward into some huge wave, too high to scale. And finally, as Harry was beginning to wonder whether he was holding her on her course, a dim mass loomed through the night, dead ahead, and Dick shouted, "The Island. Thank Heaven, we're all right now."

He had no sooner uttered the words than the sound of the engine suddenly ceased, and after a moment's hesitation the dory started to swing off into the trough of the sea. With his nerves on edge from strain they had undergone, Dick turned impatiently to his friend. "What on earth are you stopping her for?" he demanded; "we're not there yet. Start her again, quick."

But Harry, already at work cranking the wheel, only answered, "Don't get excited, Dick; I did n't shut her off. She stopped herself; something's bust, all right."

He worked for some moments without re-

A Day with the Ducks

sult, then cried in discouragement, "No go, Dick; I can't tell what's happened, but I guess it's something serious. It's too dark to see, anyway; what shall we do? Anchor where we are?"

For answer Dick threw back the hood, and hastily began getting out the oars. "How can we anchor?" he responded. "We left our road-line with the decoys when we started chasing the albino. We've got to row as we never rowed before in our lives, or we'll go drifting straight out to sea."

And then began a struggle; pull—pull—pull—with wearied muscles protesting, and an angry sea doing its best to drive them back from the shelter they sought. On and on they toiled, striving desperately to cover the little distance that remained, yet seeming scarcely to hold their own, until finally Dick cast a quick glance backward into the darkness. "Give it to her, Harry," he cried, "we're almost there. Twenty strokes more now, and we'll make it. Here goes; one, two—"

They bent to their oars with a will, putting out every ounce in them in a last desperate

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spurt, and finally, as Dick counted " sixteen — seventeen — eighteen — " the water grew magically calm, the wind seemed to cease blowing, and a moment later the bow of the dory scraped heavily on the pebbles of the beach. They had reached the Island at last.

CHAPTER IX

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

DICK stepped over the side into the shallow water, hauled the dory's bow far enough up the beach so that she could not drift off again, and then rejoined Harry in the boat. For some minutes, in spite of the tempest howling about them, they sat motionless, without speaking a word, luxuriating in the simple sensation of rest from their killing labor at the oars. But gradually, as their breath came more and more easily, and their throbbing pulses quieted again, they awakened to the danger of staying where they were on such a night. The wind shrieked vengefully overhead ; the branches of the trees swayed and groaned against the sky ; the rain was falling in torrents.

With an effort Dick aroused himself, and stood erect. " Well, old man," he said, " we're mighty lucky to be where we are. It's blowing worse than ever, I believe ; I never

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saw such a time. We would n't stand any show at all out there now. But we can't stay here ; as soon as we begin to cool off, we'll be chilled through. We'll have to strike for the Johnsons', I suppose, and explain to them how this happened. They'll put us up somewhere for the night, and we can go back in the morning."

Harry, in turn, struggled to his feet. "Yes," he assented, "that's the only thing to do. I'm soaked to the skin, Dick ; those seas out there were raking us, fore and aft. By gracious ! but won't a fire seem good ! I rather guess old Johnson won't think this is any excuse for a call ; we need help, if any one ever did. But won't they be surprised, though ! They'll wonder where on earth we've dropped from."

Dick smiled grimly, shaking his head as sheet after sheet of moisture drove past them, swept along almost horizontally by the force of the gale. "'Where we dropped from,' is good," he rejoined. "I guess they'll think we've *rained* down, all right," and disembarking, they pulled the boat a little further up the beach, and started for the house.

A Startling Discovery

In the darkness their progress was necessarily of the slowest. The rain cut viciously across their faces, with a sting like the cut of a whip; with heads lowered to the sweep of it, they toiled up the beach, over the rocks, and down into the valley below. Then another sharp ascent faced them, and Dick cried, "Now, we're getting somewhere. I know how the land lies now. Wait till we get to the top of this hill, and we'll see the house at the bottom of it. Wonder if there'll be a light burning; I suppose they may all be abed and asleep by this time."

A minute later, breathing hard with the exertion, they had breasted the hill, and then, on the instant, had stopped short with a sudden cry of amazement, for Dick's query as to the light was answered. The house below them was lit up glaringly from one end to the other. Every shade was drawn, but the dull glow from within stood out in vivid contrast against the pitch-black background of the night. "Well, what do you think of that?" cried Harry; "regular fourth of July. What the dickens do you suppose it means, Dick?"

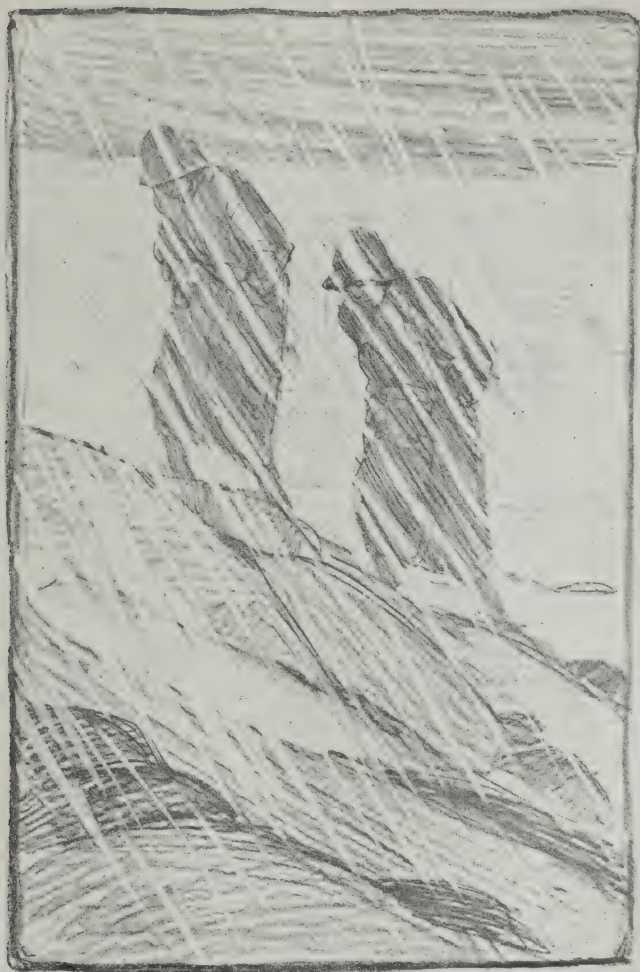
Dick made no answer, but stood gazing in

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silence at the scene before them. In spite of himself, he began to feel as though Harris and Hutchins had been right in their suspicions, and he himself had been in the wrong. The gleam of the lights in the windows did not seem to shine forth as a welcome, but as a sinister warning. And suddenly the sense of his responsibility for his companion came over him. "I don't know what the lights mean," he answered, "but I do know one thing, Harry, and that is that we don't want to be taking any chances. Maybe this crowd are all right, and maybe they're not, but we'll go slow till we find out. You get behind this big rock here, and lie low for a while, and I'll sneak down and investigate. It won't take me long to find out what's doing. You stay here, and I'll be back in a jiffy."

Harry somewhat reluctantly assented. "Well, all right," he agreed; "only hurry up, Dick. I'm cold as the deuce. I'm beginning to shiver already."

Dick nodded, and made off down the hill. At first, he advanced without any pretence at caution, but as he neared the house, he bore



TOILED UP THE BEACH OVER THE ROCKS

A Startling Discovery

away to the left, keeping in the shadow until he had come almost within range of the light which streamed forth into the darkness. Then, falling flat on his face, he wormed his way along until he had crept close up against the side of the house itself, and lay prone on the rain-soaked ground, listening eagerly for any sound which might explain the mystery within. And at once, above the howling of the storm, a noise came to his ears—not loud, but clear and distinct—a noise somehow suggesting machinery in motion. It continued steadily, at measured intervals, and once or twice he heard voices, without, however, being able to distinguish the words. Nothing else transpired, and remembering his promise to Harry, he began to wonder how he could best gain a view of the interior, without the danger of being seen himself. The shades were drawn down so far that there seemed to be no chance in that direction, but the old house was in such miserable repair that the walls fairly bristled with cracks through which the light came streaming forth in fantastic bars and patches. Selecting one of these telltale streaks of radiance larger than the rest, he crept cautiously

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forward, and with a beating heart slowly raised himself to his knees and applied his eye to the crack in the wall. For just an instant he gazed at the scene within, and then, in spite of himself, could scarcely repress the gasp of astonishment which rose to his lips. What he saw was as wholly unexpected as the image of some fantastic dream. In his own mind he had thought to discover the Johnsons seated around the fire, mending nets or knitting heads for their traps, but instead he beheld a spectacle which, in his wildest moments, he could never have conjured up to mind. The old gentleman himself stood in the centre of the room, working busily at a foot-power press, and the three boys moved quickly about, helping him skillfully and methodically in his labors. Fishermen thus turned printers would have been surprising enough, but it was the nature of their work that made Dick's mouth open, and his eyes almost start from his head. For everywhere about the room was money—more money than Dick had ever seen in his life before. All in bills—crisp, new, beautiful bills—some complete, some in different stages of manufacture, but all coming into life and

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being through the labors of the slender figure who presided, with the utmost coolness and dexterity, at the press. Counterfeiters ! In one sudden flash the whole secret burned its way into Dick's brain. Their first meeting on the train; the enormously heavy bags, guarded with such care; the time which the father and the two younger sons had spent alone on the Island; the protection of the house from intrusion; the pretence at having Big Ben carry on the fishing business — everything for the first time was made plain. Through the narrow crevice in the wall Dick gazed, fascinated. On and on went the work — the noise of the press, which had come first to his ears, was never-ceasing, and each instant more and more of this ill-begotten wealth was piling up before his very eyes. And then, as for the first time he glanced around the room, the seriousness of the whole affair struck him, like a blow in the face. The lamplight shone on revolvers, lying ready at hand on chairs and tables; against the walls stood a half-dozen rifles and carbines. Evidently, in spite of the fury of the gale, and the seeming impossibility of any one gaining access to the Island, these men were

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determined to take no slightest chance if interruption should occur. For just an instant Dick permitted himself to think what would have been their fate if he and Harry had walked up to the door, without suspicion, and either knocked or entered. He knew, as well as he knew anything in the world, that there lives would not have been worth a moment's purchase, and a wave of thankfulness swept over him, instantly followed by the further thought that even now they were by no means out of danger. Suppose Harry should grow impatient, and shout to him, or worse still, should come down toward the shanty, miss him in the dark, and knock on the door before Dick could intercept him. There was no time to lose, and dropping hastily down again on the grass, he crept quietly away as he had come.

To his infinite relief he found Harry still waiting where he had left him, though beginning to shake from head to foot with the cold and the exposure that he had undergone.

"Well?" he asked quickly, "nothing wrong, is there? Let's hurry, Dick. I can't stand much more of this." And as he spoke, he started forward in the direction of the house.

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Dick laid a hand on his arm. "Keep your nerve with you, old man," he answered, "but something *is* wrong. Harris was right; these men are counterfeiterers; and they're at work there in the shanty now. And if they knew we were on the Island, I would n't give the snap of my fingers for your life or mine."

Harry stopped short in his tracks, though to his credit he received the astounding news with comparative composure. "The deuce you say!" he exclaimed; "well, we *have* got ourselves into a mess. What are we going to do? I don't care about being shot, you can bet, but there's nothing so awfully funny about freezing to death, either. And it seems to be a case of one or the other. Which shall we choose, Dick?"

"Neither," Dick promptly answered; "it is n't quite as bad as that, just yet, Harry. Let's put back for the boat, right away, and see if we can't fix her up, and then, when it moderates, we'll be ready for a start. It can't blow very long like this. I think it's beginning to let up a little now."

Harry nodded. "I think so, too," he agreed; "our play is to make a break for shore, just

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as soon as we can. I don't really believe we can do much with the engine to-night, though; it's too dark to tell what's wrong. Still, I believe in getting just as far away from the shanty as we conveniently can. So let's march, right away. It's moderating, I'm sure."

Both spoke hopefully, really believing what they said, yet not stopping, in their excitement, to consider that they were in a comparatively sheltered portion of the Island, well protected from the full fury of the gale. But the moment they emerged at the beach, it took only an instant to make them realize their error, and to see how absolutely wild would be any thought of putting forth into the waste of raging seas that spread away to leeward of the Island. Harry was the first to speak. "Well, that's where we fooled ourselves," he remarked philosophically, "we would n't get a hundred yards, in that mix-up; that's sure."

There was no gainsaying it, for it was such a storm as was seldom seen. The wind roared overhead with terrific force, and abandoning all idea of taking to the boat, Dick began to consider the alternatives which were left to them.

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"Well, let's see," he observed thoughtfully; "now how do we stand. We have a power boat that isn't running, and it's too stormy to use her, even if she was in shape. We've got a little grub; we've got our guns, and plenty of ammunition; and we've got some matches. Now, I should say —"

Harry broke in on him. "Yes," he cried, "and see what we have against us. A gang of crooks over there in the cottage who would n't think twice about putting us out of the way, and we're so confoundedly cold and wet that if we stand around here much longer, theorizing about it, we'll be goners on our own account, without waiting for any one else to finish us. We're in a mighty mean hole, Dick, and that's what."

Dick started to reply, and then stopped short with a sudden exclamation. "I've got it," he cried; "I was just thinking how we could start a fire. Remember that cave we saw the other day? That's the place for us. Come on, Harry, and let's find it."

Harry brightened up at once. "By golly," he exclaimed, "you're right, Dick. I never thought of it. Remember the roof over the top?"

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That would keep out any rain you ever saw. It's the cave for ours, on the double-quick."

They started forward, but instantly Dick stopped again. "One thing first," he said, "we ought to haul the dory up, and hide her in the bushes. Then we won't have to worry about their seeing her, if they should come wandering over this way in the morning. It will do us good, too," he added grimly; "we won't yip about being cold when we're done. She weighs just about a ton and a half with that engine in her. Come on, now, and get her out of the way, and then we'll strike for the cave."

For half an hour they labored, placing oars under the dory to act as rollers, and straining every muscle as they hauled her slowly up the beach. Fortunately, the distance was short, and finally, as well as they could make out in the darkness, they had effectually screened her from observation. Then, keeping close together, they clambered cautiously over the rocks, until at length the mouth of the cave appeared before them. A moment later, it was as if they had suddenly entered another world. As if by magic, the roaring of the wind was

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hushed, and the thunder of the surf came but faintly to their ears. Dick scratched a match, and to their delight they found the bottom of the cave thickly strewn with driftwood, flotsam and jetsam of the sea, cast ashore in the storms of winter. It took only a moment to clear a space, and start a fire, and then Dick turned to Harry.

“Now,” he commanded, “you take off your wet clothes, and dry them, and I’ll go back and get what’s left of our lunch out of the dory. Then we’ll be ready to start light housekeeping in this hospitable spot.”

Half an hour later they were warm and dry again, and Dick, to make assurance doubly sure, mounted guard, with his gun lying ready at his side, while Harry, though protesting that he was not tired, under Dick’s orders rolled himself up on a pile of dry seaweed in front of the fire, and in a twinkling was fast asleep.

CHAPTER X

JIM HUTCHINS GETS INTO TROUBLE

ALL through the long, anxious night, Dick scarcely closed his eyes. Harry, thoroughly exhausted, lay like a log in front of the fire, but Dick, even if he had felt so disposed, was far too wakeful to sleep. He could not rid his mind of the picture that he had seen. The old shanty, with the lamplight streaming from the windows and the crevices in the walls; the stealthy movements of the figures within; the masses of counterfeit money; the gleaming barrels of the revolvers—he felt as if a mask had been suddenly dropped; as if these men, whose cause he had so innocently championed, had now, for the first time, appeared to him in their true colors as dangerous plotters and defrauders of the state.

Occasionally, as the hours passed, he replenished the fire, thanking fortune for the store of driftwood which lay ready at his hand, and

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as he watched the flames leap upward, burning red and blue and green, his thoughts, in spite of himself, began to wander from their own mishap, and he found himself dreaming of the gallant ships of old, which had gone faring forth to sea, only to lay their bones at last on the shores of this bleak Island, amid the angry roaring of the winter gales.

And then, with a start, his thoughts came back to the present once more. For the time being, he felt no fear. Sitting there in the cave, with his gun by his side, everything seemed secure. Yet he knew that the morning would bring its problems, to be met and faced. For even if Harry could repair their engine, there could be no thought of leaving the Island, while the gale lasted. In the face of the sea which was sweeping across the Bay with undiminished fury, no boat would dream of putting forth. If they stayed in the cave, there seemed, indeed, to be little danger of discovery, but, on the other hand, their slender stock of food was almost gone, and they dared light their fire only at night. There were the ducks, to be sure, which might be eaten as a last resort, yet lacking salt and the utensils for cook-

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ing, somehow Dick's appetite failed him at the thought. It appeared, on the whole, to be largely a question of how long the gale would last. To stay where they were until it abated, and then to launch their boat quietly to leeward of the Island, and to steal away unobserved — under power, if they could make repairs, rowing, if they could not — this, seemed the sensible course to pursue. That the Johnsons, by any chance, might make a search of the Island and discover them seemed unlikely enough, and thus Dick at length decided that there was small reason for worrying, and toward morning, as drowsiness overcame him, he put out the fire, stretched himself by Harry's side, and in an instant was fast asleep.

He awoke with a start, unable at first to realize where he was. And then, with a sudden rush of recollection, all the memories of the day before came back to him. Harry was still sleeping by his side. Without, the tumult of wind and wave was as loud as ever, and though the rain had ceased, from the entrance of the cave he could see the lines of crested breakers still racing by in endless procession across the Bay. He glanced at his watch, found that it

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was eight o'clock, and awakened Harry. Then, heavy-eyed, weary, and stiff and sore in every joint, they munched a water-soaked sandwich apiece, and held a council of war.

"Well," Harry began, "let's try to get this straightened out. As near as I can see, the one thing for us to do is to keep just as far away from these cheerful money-makers as we can. If we run afoul of them, we're going to get into trouble mighty quick. Is n't that right?"

"Yes, that's right," Dick assented; "as far as we're concerned, the closer we stick to this cave the healthier for us it's going to be. But there's something else, Harry, that we ought to think of, too. This may be an awfully serious matter for the Government. I don't suppose there's the slightest doubt that these men, whoever they are, are artists in their line. They would never have wasted a whole summer, and have worked out such an elaborate bluff as this camping and fishing business, if there was n't something big in it for them. Heaven only knows what this printing last night amounted to; I should hate to think, myself. I suppose they could have turned out a million dollars' worth, if they'd wanted to.

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Perhaps they have, for all we know. And we ought to try to think up some way of stopping them before they get away."

Harry nodded. "By gracious!" he said, "that's right, too, Dick. I was so busy thinking of our own precious skins that I never considered that part of it. How can we do it, Dick? Have you thought of any scheme?"

Dick hesitated. "I don't know whether it's any good or not," he answered, "but I was trying to work out something like this: To begin with, I know mighty little about counterfeiting, but I'm pretty sure that it's the making the plates that is the important part. I think I've read somewhere that to make a first-class set sometimes takes several years, and that they're worth as much as forty or fifty thousand dollars. After the plates are done, of course the printing is a comparatively simple process, but the minute it's finished, the worst danger begins for the counterfeiters. A big lot of bills is n't an easy thing to hide. So I figure it like this. This crowd here on the Island have been waiting for just such a time as last night, to do the job up quickly without danger of being caught, and now I'll

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bet that they're more anxious to get away from the Island than we are, even. The quicker they can reach the mainland, and dig out for a different locality altogether, the safer they're going to feel. How does it look to you, Harry? Don't you believe that's right?"

Harry nodded. "Yes, that sounds sensible," he returned; "but where does the stopping them come in? It's a fine idea, all right; how to carry it out is all that bothers me. What are we going to do? Come the boy hero act, and surround the house, take them all prisoners, and bring them ashore in the dory? If that's the programme, I rather think you'll have to count me out."

In spite of the gravity of the situation, Dick smiled. "No, *sir!*" he replied with emphasis, "you can just bet that isn't the programme. These chaps are out for business. They'd shoot a boy hero just as quick as they would any one else — maybe quicker. We won't take any chances that way. I don't believe my plan is very heroic, but it ought to work, just the same. I want to wait till after dark, and then slip across to the other side of the Island, swim out to their boat, and

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knock some part of their engine kicker-side-wockamus, so they can't use her. Then when it calms down, they won't be able to make much speed, rowing that big craft, and we'll surely get ashore ahead of them. See anything the matter with that?"

Harry pondered long and deeply. "I see just one thing the matter with it," he answered at last; "as long as we mind our own business, they're not going to find us, and we're going to keep out of trouble. But supposing they happen to catch you. Suppose they should start out to look at their boat while you were in the water, or just as you landed. There's no use in mincing words about it. They'd knock you in the head, in just about two seconds. Now, wouldn't they?"

Dick nodded. "That's what they'd do," he answered coolly, "and then they'd search the Island, and I suppose, in the course of time, they'd get you too. It would be simple enough. Just to launch our boat, bottom up, and let her drift ashore on the other side of the Bay, and then—not to be too morbid about it—just to tie a big rock on what used

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to be you and me, and then drop it over the cliffs. Sad drowning accident — bodies never recovered — and who would ever be the wiser? ”

Harry shivered. “ Oh, but you ’re cheerful,” he observed ; “ not but what you ’ve hit it about right, just the same. But here’s the point, Dick. I don’t believe I ’m any more cowardly than most fellows, but I don’t think that we’re called on to risk our lives in a mix-up like this. It’s not exactly our business, anyway. We come into it by accident, as you might say. Harris is the man who ought to take the chances. I suppose of course he’s really some sort of a detective, or Government man — the surveying was a bluff, just as we always thought.”

Dick nodded. “ Yes, I suppose so,” he answered ; “ and of course, as you say, it’s really his business, and not ours. I would n’t go so far as to say that we ought to try it if the chances seemed to be against us, or if they were no better than even. But I think we have everything on our side. It will be dark ; they don’t so much as dream that there’s a soul on the Island beside themselves ; and they’ll never

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think of any one's coming near their boat. I can sneak down to the beach, swim out to her, and hit their engine one good tap. And then, where are they? In a mighty bad box, I should say,—shouldn't you?"

Harry considered. "Well," he objected at last, "here's one thing we're not sure of, and that's whether we can get our own boat to run. It's all right to talk about rowing her, but rowing a power boat isn't any cinch, I want you to know. I think we'd better look to our own means of retreat before we cut off theirs."

"I think you're right," Dick assented; "you go ahead and investigate the dory, and I'll creep up to the top of the hill again, and see what I can make out there. If they should start to come this way, I'll run back and tell you, and we'll put for the cave before they get here."

"All right," Harry agreed; "but be mighty cautious about it, Dick. We aren't taking any chances, remember."

Dick smiled. "Not intentionally," he answered; "you can bet we're not. But I suppose most anything can happen, out on this

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place. We're too close to our friends in the shanty for real comfort. But I'll go up there as carefully as a fellow can, Harry. If they see me coming, they're pretty wise."

He took his departure, leaving Harry by the dory, and slowly made his way through the underbrush, by a more circuitous route than they had chosen the night before, until, lying flat on his face among a clump of low bushes, he had come once more within view of the house. Very cautiously he began to reconnoitre. The shanty was close below him, a stone's throw away. By daylight it looked innocent enough, scarcely as if it could really have been the scene of last night's defiance of the law. Of its inmates he could see no sign whatever. Very probably, he ironically reflected, they were resting after their labors. Beyond the Island the Bay was a leaping field of whitecapped waves, for though the rain had entirely ceased, and here and there a patch of blue began to show in the cloud-swept sky, the wind itself showed no slightest sign of abating, but blew like a hurricane straight out of the sou'west, sending the huge breakers crashing against the southern shore of the

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Island, and driving the masses of flying spray far inland, as each new oncoming wave hurled itself to destruction against the rocky rampart of the cliffs. For a long time Dick lay gazing, fascinated by the sight, and then suddenly, far away in the distance, he caught sight of a gleam of brown against the sea. Unable to believe his eyes, he glanced quickly away, then looked again, and as he did so, his heart sank, for this time there was no mistake. A boat was coming toward them, where no boat should have ventured on such a day, and Dick knew her at once for the dory belonging to the only man in the Cove who would have taken such a chance — to old Jim Hutchins himself.

Nearer and nearer she came, reeling onward through the heaving seas, now almost disappearing in a smother of foam, then rising again, her long bow seeming to throw itself clean out of water against the background of level sky, before she dipped again, like a sea gull, plunging headlong into the hollow of the rushing waves. She was bound straight for the Island; so much was clear. But on what errand, Dick wondered. Had he heard

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of their absence, and started forth to search for them? It seemed likely. For what other purpose could have brought him out, on such a day and in the teeth of such an angry sea? And as Dick lay watching, all at once, with a start, he perceived that others beside himself were interested in the dory's approach. The Johnsons, as usual, were on the alert, for Big Ben had come out of the house, shading his eyes with his hand as he stood looking forth to sea. Instantly he called to the others, and a second later his father and his two brothers joined him; then, as there seemed to be no doubt of Hutchins's destination, all four leaped quickly for the shelter of the house. Dick could imagine what must be going on within, — the hurried concealment of implements and money, — and his courage failed him as he thought of what might happen when Hutchins should reach the shore. Yet there seemed no possible way to warn him. To call attention to the fact that he and Harry were on the Island would only make a bad matter worse. And thus he lay still and waited, his body pressed close against the ground, his eyes following every movement of the old dory, as

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she fought her way gallantly onward, bidding defiance to roaring wind and dashing sea.

The minutes passed, and at length she came opposite the entrance of the Cove. Here was the critical point of the whole voyage; to Dick it seemed an impossibility that a man could navigate between the two narrow points of land, yet old Hutchins held to his course, unflinching, and the dory sped forward, on the crests of the huge seas, like a racer nearing the goal. Dick could see the old man's figure, crouched tensely in the stern, his body bent a little forward, his hands gripping the spokes of the wheel, his eyes fixed straight before him — an instant passed, and then a great roller bore down, caught up the dory as if she had been a feather, hurled her forward through the narrow channel, and like lightning Hutchins had shot her bow around, and brought her neatly to anchor in the smooth water to leeward of the point. Then, bailing out the skiff, he rowed hurriedly toward the beach. The Johnsons were at the water's edge to meet him, and Dick, lying with his eyes riveted on the group, could imagine the exchange of question and answer that was going on be-



DICK HOPED TO SEE HUTCHINS ROW AWAY

Jim Hutchins gets into Trouble

low him. His one hope was to see Hutchins jump into his skiff again, and row away, but presently, to his horror, the whole party, still talking earnestly together, left the beach, and came walking slowly up the path toward the house. Dick could not help noticing the order in which they advanced — the elder Johnson in the lead, Hutchins behind him, with one of the younger boys on either hand, and Big Ben, directly behind Hutchins, bringing up the rear of the sinister procession. Before the house, they came to a halt, and Dick, straining his ears, could hear what they were saying.

Hutchins was speaking. "Well," he observed, "it looks mighty bad to me. I'm afraid it's good-bye to them boys. Their boat's gone; that's a sure sign they went shootin', 'cause I know they had it all planned, the night before. An' they were n't around here, 'cause I was gunnin' inside the Island, all day, an' did n't see nothin' of 'em. They must have went over to the Neck—they was talkin' some of doin' that, the night before. But I telephoned over there this mornin', an' no one's heard nothin' about 'em. No, sir, it certainly looks bad to me.'

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“ Oh, I can’t think they’ve come to harm,” Dick heard Johnson answer; “ I suppose they may have broken down, and gone ashore somewhere. Why don’t you keep on to leeward, and see if you don’t get news of them across the Bay ? ”

The old man nodded his approval. “ That ’s a good idee,” he answered, “ an’ it ’s just what I’ll do. But if you could git me that cup o’ coffee, now, it would go almighty good. I ain’t had a bite to eat this mornin’ ; I left in a terrible hurry.”

Dick felt his heart sink at the words. There was an awkward pause. Big Ben stepped quietly up behind Hutchins, but the elder Johnson gave the slightest perceptible shake of his head.

“ Mr. Hutchins,” he said, “ I ’m awfully sorry — really, I ’m ashamed to confess it — but we have n’t a drop of coffee in the house. Ben forgot it, the last time he went across, and we used up all we had two days ago. Why don’t you go home again, and get a good breakfast there, before you continue your search? I don’t believe there is any real hurry ; I ’m sure the boys cannot have come to any harm.”

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Hutchins shook his head. "You can't tell nothin' at all about it," he answered, "an' I ain't takin' no chances, if there's anythin' I might be able to do. I don't want to waste the time it would take goin' home. Never mind the coffee; give me a bite of anythin' an' I'll head the old dory to the leeward again."

As he spoke, he stepped toward the house, apparently not considering the possibility of their refusing him a bite to eat.

For just a moment Johnson hesitated. Then, seeming suddenly to have made up his mind, he turned to his sons. "Come on, boys," he said significantly, "into the house with you now, and get something ready for Mr. Hutchins."

The next instant they had disappeared from view, and Dick lay listening in an agony of apprehension, trying to picture to himself the scene within. Was it possible, he wondered, that the Johnsons might have cleared away all signs of the night before, and that they might give Hutchins his breakfast and let him depart in peace? It seemed scarcely probable. The old man's keen eye must detect something

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out of the ordinary in the condition of the house, and then what would be the result? For one wild instant Dick thought of creeping down to the house, to try to aid if matters should come to a crisis. But sober second-thought prevented him. He had left his gun in the cave; it would be two unarmed men against four fully armed and desperate; and thus he lay quietly where he was, straining his ears for the sounds of conflict from the shanty below.

The moments passed. Nothing broke the stillness; and Dick was just beginning to think that Hutchins would emerge unscathed from his adventure, when suddenly there broke forth the very outcry he had dreaded to hear—first a shout, then the sound of a terrific scuffle, a cry, and the next moment Hutchins burst from the shanty, and ran, as fast as his legs could carry him, toward the beach. But not unpursued. Close at his heels came Big Ben, revolver in hand, and even in the excitement of the moment, Dick could see that the blood was running down his face. The chase could have but one ending. The younger man was by far the fleeter of foot, yet evidently he had

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no intention of coming to a grapple with his adversary. Suddenly he stopped short, and raised his revolver; and at the sight, Dick's face went white; then, from the house, he heard Johnson's voice shrieking out some command that he could not distinguish. Whatever it was, it was effectual, for Big Ben instantly changed his plan of attack. He lowered his revolver, grasped it by the barrel, and sent it hurtling through the air. His aim was true. The heavy weapon struck the old man fairly between the shoulder blades; he threw up his hands, staggered, and crashed headlong to the ground. At once, Big Ben was upon him; the others came rushing down from the house, the youngest of the brothers with a rope in his hand, and in a twinkling they were bearing Hutchins's body between them back toward the shanty. Dick could not see the old man's face, but his heart misgave him as he saw that he no longer struggled, that his arms dragged on the ground, and that his head hung limp from his shoulders. And then, as the whole group again disappeared in the house, he turned, and made swiftly for the cave.

CHAPTER XI

A FLIGHT — AND A PURSUIT

AS Dick passed hurriedly along the beach he noticed that their dory was still carefully concealed among the bushes, and that Harry was nowhere in sight. Evidently, his companion had either repaired the engine, or had failed in his attempt, and had returned to the cave. And there, a few moments later, he found him, sitting with his chin in his hands, gazing dejectedly out to sea.

Dick's bad news must have been reflected in his face, for at once Harry cried, "What's the matter? What's wrong now?" — and as Dick, panting with haste and excitement, told his story, Harry leaped to his feet with a gesture of uncontrollable grief. "Poor old Jim!" he exclaimed, "I never dreamed of such a thing. To come looking for us, in all this sea, and then to run into trouble like that. Isn't there something we can do, Dick? Do you suppose they've really killed him? Would they murder a man, in cold blood?"

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Dick shook his head despairingly. "I don't know, Harry," he answered; "but I don't believe this crowd would stop at anything. And I don't see what we can do either. They're sure to keep a sharp lookout, now, and we could n't get near the house without their seeing us. Then it would be three lives instead of one. I'd better go back, though, and keep watch of what's going on. I've a plan that might work out, I think. But how about the engine, Harry? Could you make her go?"

Harry shook his head. "Not much!" he answered briefly; "it's the connecting-rod that's broken, of all things in the world. We could n't fix it, on this Island, in a hundred years. That's absolutely sure."

Dick shrugged his shoulders. "Well, never mind," he rejoined, "we'll have to do without her, then. It does n't matter so much now, anyway; we'll have to alter our schemes a bit. And, look here, Harry, while I'm gone, I wish you'd bring a lot of good-sized rocks up from the beach to the cave, and make a kind of a rampart, at the entrance, so that a fellow could stand a siege here, for a while, if he

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had to. You get busy with that, and I'll be back as soon as I can."

Harry nodded, and set to work, while Dick retraced his steps, and soon lay once more in his hiding-place in the bushes, gazing down at the shanty. For almost two hours there was no sign of life from within, and then, all at once, the door opened, and Big Ben and his father emerged. By chance, they came around the corner of the house which pointed to the southeast, and thus stood within easy ear-shot of Dick. Big Ben appeared to be in an even worse humor than usual. One side of his face was bandaged, and the cloth was streaked and mottled with red.

"You were a fool, I tell you," he was saying, "not to let me shoot."

His father seemed anxious to placate him. "Well," he answered, "there was the dory in the Cove, and there might have been other men wild enough to put across the Bay, on a day like this. And to have a man's boat on your hands, without the man, doesn't look well. No, no, Ben, we did the wise thing. Wait until the wind goes down, and we'll leave him in full possession of the Island."

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That some sinister meaning attached itself to the words was evident, for Big Ben smiled as if pleased. "Sure; that's the talk," he answered, "it's as simple as A, B, C. Just as soon as she moderates, I'll put out of the cove in our boat, tow his after me, and when I get out where it's good and rough, I'll fill her and let her drift. Then I'll come ashore again, and I'll send the old fool where potatoes won't freeze. And after that, we'll make tracks, as quick as the Lord will let us. No more of this cursed Island for ours."

Dick listened with mingled emotions. Clearly, they had not killed Hutchins, but clearly, also, his life hung by a thread. As soon as it moderated—that was the key to the whole situation. Dick glanced anxiously to windward, but his courage returned at the sight. It had cleared steadily, all through the day, and the blue sky was fast putting the clouds to rout, but the wind itself was still blowing with undiminished vigor, and as he gazed at the sea which was running, he wondered more and more how Hutchins could ever have made the crossing in safety. Little danger, he reflected, that any one else would try to do likewise.

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It was a case of taking one's life in one's hands.

Big Ben stood steadfastly regarding the entrance to the cove. Line after line of white-crested breakers came rushing in through the narrow mouth, filling the whole Island with their roaring. He shrugged his shoulders. "No good now, anyway," he observed; "might as well go back to the house, and wait." And they disappeared again around the corner of the shanty.

Dick lay watching for an hour longer, and then, as it became evident that the wind could not possibly go down before night, he retraced his steps to the cave. Harry, he discovered, had not been idle. A solid rampart of rock defended the entrance, with two loopholes bearing on either side, just large enough to admit the muzzle of Harry's gun. The work of defence had been well done, and Harry was resting after his labors.

"Well," he asked anxiously, as Dick scaled the pile of stones, "any news?"

Dick nodded. "Good, what there is of it," he returned; "Jim's alive; I know that much. But if we want to save him, Harry, we've got

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to take a chance. And this is how I've figured it out. I think, from the looks of things, that the wind is going to moderate to-night. Whether she does, or whether she doesn't, I'm going to wait until after dark, and then I'm going to sneak around to the cove, just as I'd planned it before. But then I'm going to vary my scheme. I'm going to get out to their boat, smash their engine, and then I'm going to get into Jim's dory, and put her for shore. If I get there, I'll have Harris, Murray, and the Kid, and any one else I can raise, across here in no time. And we'll give these chaps a run for their money. What do you think of that?"

Harry reflected. "I don't want to let you take all the chances," he replied at length; "what do you mean for me to do? Just sit here, behind this barricade, and repel boarders?"

Dick nodded. "Exactly," he answered; "there's no sense in our both going; in fact, two would attract more attention than one. And if things should n't work out well — if they should happen to wing me on my way out — why, you're safe here, I'm sure. You

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could stand off an army in this place. But it's Jim I'm thinking of. He's in a bad box, Harry, and we want to help him if we can."

Harry nodded, though unwillingly. "I suppose that's right, Dick," he said, "and I suppose you have a ten times better chance of getting through than I would. But if I had n't been sick, and was in any kind of shape, I'd make you toss for it, anyway."

Dick laid his hand on his friend's shoulder. "And I'd let you, Harry," he answered; "it is n't any question of which of us runs the most risk. It's just a case of helping Jim, and, as you say, I guess I'm in better shape, physically, to make the try. And now I'm going to turn in and get some sleep. If the wind should start to moderate, wake me right away, and if they should really start to carry out their plans, we'll have to try something desperate, to circumvent them. But it's going to keep on blowing, I'm sure. I suppose, in an hour or so, you might take a trip up to the hill, and see if there's anything doing. But I think everything's safe for the afternoon." And rolling over on his side, in two minutes he was asleep.

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It was nearly dark when Harry awakened him. He sat up abruptly, a little bewildered, but noticing at once that the sound of the wind seemed to come to his ears with lessened volume. He turned anxiously to Harry. "Is she moderating?" he asked.

Harry nodded. "Yes, but not a great deal," he replied. "I've been keeping a good watch. There's not much change since you went to sleep. Big Ben and his father came out of the house twice while I was there, and looked around at the weather, and finally shook their heads and went back again. I don't believe they like the suspense any more than we do."

Dick rose slowly to his feet. "My! but that sleep did me good," he observed, "I feel in great shape now. I'd like to start, as soon as it's dark, but I'm going to wait until after midnight, anyway. That's the time they'll be least likely to be watching, I'm sure."

Harry gave a sudden exclamation. "There, that reminds me," he cried, "I meant to ask you, Dick. Did you remember that to-night was almost full moon? That's going to make it mighty bad for you."

Dick whistled. "By gracious!" he ex-

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claimed in turn, "I forgot all about it. We've had so much stormy weather, I forgot there was such a thing as a moon. And she'll certainly be bright to-night," he added, glancing up at the clearing sky. "Well, it's too bad, but it can't be helped; I'll have to do the best I can."

Harry nodded. "Yes, that's right," he assented, "but I'm sorry, just the same. Are you going to take your gun, Dick?"

Dick shook his head. "No, I think not," he answered, "it would be awfully in the way. And if it came to anything like that, why, I guess revolvers and rifles would have the call over duck shot. No, I'll leave the old shooting-iron in the cave."

Shortly after midnight, he had gripped Harry's hand in silent farewell, and had made his way out of the entrance into the darkness beyond. He had stripped down to shirt, trousers, and stockings, and the keen night air cut through him like a knife. Once past the beach, he skirted along the edge of the trees to the right, proceeding cautiously, with ears strained for the slightest sound. As he stole along, he tried to calculate how the chances of the ad-

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venture really stood. It seemed to him almost certain that the Johnsons would not make a move before daylight, for the wind, though gradually abating, still blew briskly, and the sea seemed as high as it had been at any time during the storm. What possible reason, then, could they have for keeping watch over the boats through the night, and why would he not pull off his plan successfully, always provided that he could make his way in safety against the gigantic waves which swept the Bay? Hope beat high in his breast, and the excitement of the venture thrilled him from head to foot. And thus he crept forward on his way until he emerged from the shelter of the woods and could see before him the outline of the Island's southern shore.

And now the difficult part of the adventure began. Across the cove, some two hundred yards away, lay the house. Before him was the cove itself, the rocky entrance churned white with foam, but within the shelter of the cliffs on either hand peaceful and calm. The big round moon had already mounted clear of the horizon, and by its light he could see the Johnsons' launch and Hutchins's dory riding

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at anchor, while on the beach the two skiffs lay side by side. For a moment he hesitated. If the conditions had been different, he would rather have taken his chance at swimming, but the heavy sea had choked the cove with kelp and seaweed, he was sorely in need of food, and the air and the water alike were chilling to the blood. It seemed doubtful if a voyage thus begun could successfully be carried through, on the score of exhaustion alone, and unwillingly he made up his mind that it was toward the skiffs that he must make his way. The distance was nothing, — it was scarcely fifty yards from where he stood lurking in the shadow, — but the country which he must traverse lay absolutely open, unprotected by so much as a single bush. Yet there seemed no other way, and presently, waiting until a cloud larger and blacker than usual came skimming out of the west, at the moment when its edge touched the rim of the moon, he dropped flat on his face and began to worm his way along, foot by foot, toward the boats.

He had not traversed more than a quarter of the distance, when all too soon the shade of the friendly cloud was withdrawn, and on

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the instant he lay motionless, anxiously waiting to see if there would be sight or sound of any one stirring about the house. But to his intense relief he heard nothing but the lapping of the waves against the beach, and the roaring of the breakers on the rocks outside the cove ; saw nothing but the shadows of the flying clouds trembling across the sand ; and as the sky darkened again, he once more crept forward on his way.

Though the distance was short, his progress was so slow and his halts were so frequent that almost half an hour had passed before he crawled close to the side of the nearest skiff, and lay hidden under the shadow of her rail. Drawing a long breath of relief, he rolled over on his back, stretching his cramped muscles and allowing them to rest before he should begin the final and most hazardous stage of his journey. He took one last look at the shanty. No light was anywhere visible ; no sign of any one on guard. "Well," he reflected, "there's no use calculating now. One time is just about as good as another. If I wait much longer, it will be coming on daylight. Here goes !" And suiting the action to the word, he rose quietly

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to his feet, bending over as much as possible, and began cautiously to push the skiff down the slope of the beach. To his delight he made little noise in the process, and soon was almost halfway to the water's edge. The success of his venture seemed already assured, and he found himself thrilling with excitement. "This is easy," he muttered to himself; "I'll give these chaps the surprise of their lives —"

But the sentence was never finished; the surprise was not to be wholly on his side. Whether it was the noise of the scraping pebbles or simply a coincidence in time he could never tell, but on the instant the door of the shanty burst open, and there came a cry that rent the silence of the night — a shout of mingled astonishment and anger, then the sound of hurrying feet dashing down from the house toward the beach at headlong speed, while the runner, as he advanced, never for a moment relaxed his cries. Realizing that there was no further hope of concealment, Dick shoved the skiff down the beach as quickly as he could run, pushed her off, leaped in, seated himself at the oars, and began to pull for the dory with all his might. Yet at such a

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crisis the seconds — even the fractions of seconds seemed hours in length. In the darkness he slipped as he took his seat, one of the oars came out of the rowlock, and in spite of the vigorous shove he had given her, the force of the wind drove the dory's bow in toward the shore. He dared not waste a moment in looking to see what progress his pursuer might be making, but was conscious, none the less, of his rapid approach down the beach. And as Dick finally took his first desperate stroke at the oars, putting forth all his strength in one mighty heave, his assailant reached the shore, and threw himself headlong into the water after the skiff. Even in the darkness, Dick was conscious that it was not Big Ben, and felt a momentary sense of relief that it was so, well knowing that if it should come to a grapple, he would have no chance whatever against the giant's strength. Plainly, it was one of the two younger brothers — he gave another stroke — the light skiff shot forward — was all but clear — and then, as Dick swung forward to take the third stroke which would place him in temporary safety, even as the blades of his oars caught the water, his pur-

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suer thrust forward his arm, made one desperate clutch at the stern of the skiff, and by the breadth of a hair, caught it and held it safe. Dick lashed the water with his oars, yet he felt the boat stop as if anchored, and though he strove desperately, he knew that his efforts were vain. It was like a moment in some agonized nightmare — while all the time the man in the water struggled with equal desperation to gain a footing, shaking the frail skiff frantically, in an effort to overturn her. And throughout the excitement, Dick was conscious of something else — a confusion of noises on shore — lights flashing in the shanty — surely the game was going against him. He must act, and that quickly — so much was evident. Hastily, yet with caution, he rose to his feet, unshipping one oar, and as his adversary once more gave the skiff a sudden wrench, Dick shifted his weight to restore his balance, and half frenzied with the strain, shouted out, "Let go! Let go now, or I'll smash you!"

But his adversary was game, and instead of relinquishing his grip, he redoubled his efforts, evidently figuring that if he could only hold on until help should arrive, the rest

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would be easy. And now, to Dick's dismay, he could see other figures emerging from the house. Instantly he grasped the light oar like a club, whirled it around his head, and struck with all his might — once — twice — thrice — at the figure beneath him. Clogged and hampered by his position, there was little chance for the man in the water to parry successfully, and at the third stroke, something seemed to give beneath the blow, there came a scream of pain, and with it the weight on the skiff's stern suddenly relaxed. Dick, losing his balance, half fell, half seated himself, on the thwart, and reshipping his oars, gave way, with the energy of terror, for the dory, which loomed up in the darkness, straight ahead.

His breath came quick and hard, partly from his exertions, partly from the excitement, but as he drove the skiff along, he had little thought for the man in the water behind him. His eyes were fixed on the running figures as he rowed, and he no longer dreamed of trying to cripple the counterfeiter's engine. His sole ambition was to reach the dory, cast off, and get her in motion before his adversaries could launch their own skiff in pursuit, or — what he dreaded

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most — bring their revolvers to bear upon him in the darkness.

A score of vigorous strokes brought him even with the dory's bow. In a twinkling he had leaped aboard, let go the painter of the skiff, and cast the buoy of the road-line to the winds. As he threw on the switch, there came a sharp report from the beach, and a revolver bullet whizzed over his head, flying wild in the gloom. He had no time to feel a sensation of fear, but, bending over the wheel, he cranked it desperately. In vain. She did not spark; and he felt a sensation of blind dread. Inshore, he heard the scraping of the pebbles as the skiff was launched, and methodically, all the while, the spiteful bark of the revolver sounded from the shore, and the drone of the bullets filled the air about him. What was wrong, he wondered? Could one of the sets of batteries have given out? Quick as thought, he threw over the switch, and cranked the wheel again. Oh, the blessed sense of relief. He had guessed right. She caught quick and true, and the next moment his hands were on the wheel, and he was steering the dory straight for the mouth of the cove. Bending low be-

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hind the rail, he took time for one quick glance behind him. The pursuers had launched their skiff, and were rowing after him, but with the speed his craft was making, he had no fear of being overtaken, and to his infinite relief, the rough water so disturbed their aim that the bullets no longer caused him any uneasiness. And with this one glance he dismissed them from his mind, for now he needed all his skill to face the fury of the storm. Through the mouth of the cove the waves came foaming in, towering high, white-crested in the moonlight, and leaping onward through the entrance, in steady, crashing phalanx, line after line. There was no time to hold back and await his chance; instinctively he tested the ropes which fastened the hood, looked to see that everything was secure; passed his hand over the switch; and then, with face set and every muscle tense and on the alert, like a horseman putting his steed at some mighty barrier, he headed the dory straight for sea. There was not long to wait. Soon she caught the lesser waves, rising to them easily and well; then came two or three larger and higher, and the spray began to fly past on either hand.

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He glanced quickly at the shore ; he had gained tremendously ; he was midway in the channel now, and to his joy the water seemed to be growing smoother. He drew a long breath of relief, yet drew it too soon. He heard a shout behind him — a shout with a ring of triumph in it — and peering forward he understood. From out of the darkness a great wall of water was bearing down upon him — a monster wave, so high that he seemed to linger at its base, so high that he abandoned hope that his boat could ever rise to meet it. Yet he underrated the dory's power, and forgot the tremendous upward heave from the shallow water as the wave bore down through the narrow channel. How it all happened, in the gloom of the night, and under the strain of the moment, he could never have told afterward, but in one sudden instant, as the wave threatened to overwhelm him, breaking as it passed, the dory seemed to hurl herself bodily forward and upward, the hood broke the force of the solid water, the spray and foam flew past him in showers, and out of it all he emerged, drenched and soaked to the skin, his boat half full of water, but with the engine still pulsing

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bravely along, and with the low line of the mainland only a mile away.

For a moment or two, unnerved by all that he had undergone, Dick felt a sensation akin to faintness—a blind, unreasoning terror at being there alone, in the midst of the raging gale and the rolling sea. But the next moment he had regained his courage; this was no time to weaken; the work which lay before him was hard enough still. And as he set to work to bail out the dory, he thought, with a fierce excitement, of the baffled counterfeiters on the Island. Surely, he reasoned, after seeing that monster wave break over him, they would scarcely dare to follow in their open launch; they were penned in, on the Island, like rats in a trap; and now it only remained for him to raise a sufficient force to go back and take them captive. Steadily he nursed the dory along through the seas, and she made splendid weather of it, justifying all that old Hutchins had ever claimed for her. Dick felt the excitement of the whole affair run through his veins like fire. There was a magic about the scene, — the tossing seas, the tumult of the storm, the moonlight shining

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through the cloud;—it was a fight that he was making, and he had right on his side. He was going to win.

Minute after minute passed. Nearer and nearer came the shore. And then, suddenly, the fortunes of the night seemed once more about to shift. For Dick, glancing behind him, more from instinct than because he really feared pursuit, saw a sight which made him almost doubt his senses. Not an eighth of a mile astern the counterfeiters' launch came dashing through the seas. They had dared the passage, after all; they were after him; and though they were making poor weather of it, and he could see the spray leaping over them in clouds, still they kept her gamely on her course, and with her greater power the distance between them grew steadily less. There could be little question as to the result; they would surely overtake him, before he could get to land, and since they had taken the risk of embarking, and had somehow managed to clear the mouth of the cove, there could be no doubt regarding the seriousness of their purpose. He could expect no quarter at their hands, especially after he had disabled

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one of them. Some huge sea to overwhelm them; — that seemed to be his only chance.

Hoping against hope, he held the dory steadily on her course, then turned and cast another look over his shoulder, to find his pursuers rapidly closing the space between them. And suddenly the one possible chance of salvation occurred to him. Hastily, as if making a desperate effort to evade his adversaries, he shifted the dory's bow at right angles to the course she was on; then, after a moment at the wheel had given him his direction, he lashed it fast, looked behind him and saw, with a grim smile, that the pursuing boat had instantly altered her course in turn, and waiting until a cloud came over the surface of the moon, he slipped quietly over the dory's side, and struck out, with all his remaining strength, for shore.

CHAPTER XII

THE END

HARRIS, Murray, and the Kid sat around the table, in the centre of the tent. With the approach of cooler weather lumber and nails had transformed their dwelling into what Murray had described as a "near house," but in spite of the added protection and the fire which burned briskly in the stove, the place was bitterly cold, and the trainer's humor was not of the best. "Well, Bill," he was saying, "this ought to be about your time for pulling off the Stealthy Steve act. If it's your idea that these gents on the Island were waiting for a storm to finish up their little game, why, there don't appear to me to be much doubt but what they've got it. She's certainly hitting her up, outside."

He drew his chair up closer to the stove as he spoke, and stretched out his hands to the warmth. The sound of the wind was dreary enough to listen to, for the "near house" was

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never intended for anything but a summer habitation, and the keen October westerly found each crack and cranny in its walls.

Harris nodded. "Yes," he answered, "you're surely right. And I don't doubt but what they're just as anxious to get away from here as you are. It's a close thing, all around, and just as soon as this blow goes down, we want to make our move. That's our chance to get 'em, without a doubt. But it won't be to-night. Sometime to-morrow will be about as early as there's going to be much cruising done."

Murray yawned. "You really think they're the parties you're after, do you?" he asked. "I've known quite a bunch of crooks in my time, and I must say this crowd don't seem to have many of the earmarks, to me. If they're the chaps you think they are, why, then they're a lot different from most. And you can bet on that."

Harris nodded with emphasis. "You never spoke a truer word," he rejoined; "that's what's made it such a ticklish job to pull off right. If they were average criminals, I'd have landed 'em long before this. But they're a different sort altogether. They're wonders;

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that's what they are. If I told you only half the trouble they've made at Headquarters, you'd think I was lying to you. And if I could have looked ahead, and seen the time I was going to have chasing them around the country, I believe I'd have come pretty close to giving up my job, before I ever tacked on to old man Johnson and his precious sons. I've travelled more miles than a thousand, and they've thrown me off the scent more than once. And to run 'em down at last, here in this hole of a place, out on that God-forsaken island, why, it seems a funny thing, right through. But it's just what you'd expect of 'em; they're first-raters, they are."

Murray nodded. "I'll bet they are," he assented, a note of half-unwilling admiration in his voice; "a man's got to be smart to fit in their trade. He's got to carry his brains in his fingers, and don't you forget it. But I'd like their skill, just the same, to put to some honest purpose. I'd be a richer man than I am now."

He rose, as he spoke, and strolled over to the window, peering out into the night. "Still she blows," he observed; and then, a moment

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later, "I don't seem to see any light in the boys' house. They must have turned in early to-night. Now I come to think of it, it was the same thing yesterday, too. I remember looking across the beach, just about this same time, and the house was dark."

The Kid shrugged his shoulders. "Well, what else would they be doing, weather like this?" he remarked; "there's not much else you can do but sleep. I guess they're a whole lot warmer than we are, anyway. This place of ours might be all right, perhaps, but it isn't Fifth Avenue, by a long shot."

The others made no effort to dispute this somewhat obvious proposition, and silence reigned in the shanty, while from outside came the sound of the howling of the gale and the roaring of the sea.

Murray turned from the window. "Darn the wind in these cracks," he complained; "makes me feel real cheerful, like funerals and things like that. Come on, boys, for goodness' sake, let's get to bed."

The hours passed. All was quiet in the tent on the beach, while out in the Bay the boy

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whom the Kid had envied for being comfortably at home in a warm house was battling sturdily against wind and wave, fighting desperately for the lives of others, and for his own. Once over the dory's side, and swimming for the shore, he felt no trace of uneasiness that the counterfeiters would ever find him. Cradled in the hollows of the seas, he scarcely saw his own dory again, and caught but one fleeting glimpse of the pursuing launch as she swept by in the gloom. But though that danger no longer threatened him, he had little time in which to congratulate himself, busied as he was with his struggle against the storm. Even at this slight distance from shore there was a heavy sea, nor did it come in a regular swell, on which he might have calculated, husbanding his strength, but instead there was a short, rough chop, so that it was impossible to judge when and where the waves would strike him. At first, in the excitement of the chase, he did not notice the chill of the water, but soon, weakened as he was with exposure, loss of sleep, and lack of wholesome food, it began to cut through him like a knife. The impulse to give way to a panic of fright, to start and swim with

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what strength he had left, became almost uncontrollable, so that it took all his will power to buckle down grimly to his work, and to struggle painfully on, heading for the break in the trees on shore which told him that the long sand beach lay before him, somewhere in the darkness. Harder and harder grew his task, and presently, in spite of every effort of muscle, brain, and nerve, he felt as if the whole adventure was nothing but one wild nightmare, from which he would suddenly awaken, startled from sleep, in his bed at home. The shore seemed as far away as ever; he could not tell whether he was really nearing it, or was being swept farther out to sea. A wave broke over him, just as he was drawing a long, gasping breath, and he coughed and choked, making a wry face at the taste of salt in mouth and lungs. And thus, ever weakening, but still doing all that lay in him, with courage undiminished, he fought on and on, until at last, though too far spent to realize its meaning, he was dimly aware that the water was smoother now, and an instant later he saw before his wearied eyes the shadowy outline of the shore. On the impulse of the moment,

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he dropped his feet, to see if he could touch bottom, and to his intense relief, he felt the sand beneath him. Half swimming, half walking, he stumbled on, and a minute later fell, breathless and exhausted, on the beach.

For some little time he lay there, as if in a daze, then, summoning all his strength, he rose weakly and dizzily to his feet, and groped his way up the slope of the sand, toward the tent at the top of the beach—a weary, bedraggled figure, the mere shadow of Dick Randall who had left on the ducking expedition two days before. Yet he had come through to the end, and fifteen minutes later across the current of Harris's dreams there came a sudden loud, insistent knocking at the door; a brief parley, the bolt shot back, and Dick stumbled forward into the room. Question and answer flashed to and fro, until his astounding story was told.

There was little time for words. Murray turned swiftly to Harris. "Well," he asked briefly, "what next?"

"What next?" echoed Harris; "why, as soon as they overhaul Dick's dory and find the trick he's played them, they'll put back for

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the Island, right away. They 'll know that if Dick was there, Harry must be there too. And Heaven only knows what they've done to Hutchins. We must start for the Island ourselves; they've forced our hand, that's all. But the dory's gone; what can we do for a boat?"

Dick spoke up promptly. "Joe Lincoln, the man who fishes off shore of Hutchins, has a good boat," he said; "he lives about a half-mile down the beach from Jim. But I don't know whether he'll want to risk trying it."

"Well, if he won't," Harris answered, "you'll have to run her yourself, Dick. You could do it, could n't you?"

Dick nodded. "I think so," he answered; "he uses the same kind of an engine that Hutchins does. But when he knows Jim's in trouble, I guess he'll go, all right. They all think a good deal of the old man. We mustn't waste a minute, either; let's make a start."

While they talked, he had been hastily donning dry clothes, yet even their grateful warmth could not restore his strength in a moment, and as he started for the door a tem-

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porary faintness stole over him and he grasped at a chair for support.

Harris looked at him keenly. "You're about all in," he said kindly; "better make yourself some coffee, get to bed, and wait for us here. You don't want to finish yourself over this business; you've done your share now."

But Dick shook his head. He was trembling like a leaf, but he was game to the end. "I could n't stay here," he replied; "I'd worry myself to death about Harry and Jim; let's get going, right away."

Harris nodded. "Suit yourself," he rejoined; "if you can stand it, all right; we need you. Come on now, boys: help yourselves."

And he threw open the door of a tall case leaning against the wall, disclosing a half-dozen rifles and an equal number of revolvers. Clearly, the Johnsons were not the only men prepared to fight.

Hastily taking a rifle and a revolver apiece, they donned their oilskins and stepped out into the darkness. The first faint light of the dawn was showing in the east, and they could see their way dimly before them as they struck off down the beach.

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As they neared Lincoln's cottage, Harris bade the others go to the landing and launch the skiff. "If we burst in on him this way," he said, "the whole crowd of us armed like pirates, we'll probably scare him half to death. You get things ready, and I'll be along as soon as I can."

They walked on alone, hauled the skiff down to the water's edge, and stood gazing out into the blackness, seeking to catch a glimpse of the launch or of the Island, but the light was still faint in the eastern sky, and only the waste of tossing waters stretched before them into the distance.

The Kid thoughtfully fingered his rifle. "This time in the morning, a fellow's courage is bad," he soliloquized; "makes you think how a little piece of lead could settle your business, once and for all. Hope, if any one has to get it, it is n't us."

Neither of the others answered him. Dick, indeed, scarcely knew that he had spoken, for his thoughts were far away, with his friends on the Island. The minutes dragged slowly on until presently they heard the sound of footsteps, and a moment later Harris and Lincoln

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appeared. No one spoke, except to exchange the briefest of greetings, and they put forth at once for the dory.

"Now, then," Lincoln commanded, "two of you get forward, under the hood, and the other two stay aft here along with me. That's going to trim her about right."

They quickly obeyed, and their skipper stood gazing for a moment out to sea. "You say you want me to put her across for the Island?" he asked of Harris.

Harris nodded. "That's what we want," he rejoined; "can you make it?"

Lincoln hesitated before replying. "Well," he said at last, "it ain't going to be no picnic; that's sure. My dory won't go where Jim's will, I'm free to confess, but if these gents that you're after are navigatin' the Bay in that gingerbread launch o' theirs, without no hood on her, why, I guess we got a right to try it too. Though why they ain't been drowned by this time sure beats me. I guess some one's lookin' out for 'em all right, an' not from above, either."

He stooped, threw on the switch, cranked the engine with a practised hand, and the

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next moment they were dashing forward through the clouds of flying spray. No further word was spoken. The same thought was in the minds of all as they fought their way onward through the combing seas. Could they make the Island, and if so, would they be in time to aid their friends ?

Gradually, in the east the sky grew bright, and Dick, gazing anxiously out over the hood, suddenly cried, "There they are! Right ahead of us! And making for the Island, too!"

The others looked where he pointed. It was true; there was no mistaking the counterfeiter's launch. She hung low in the water, and even in the dim light they could see that two of her crew were bailing.

Dick turned to Lincoln. "Will they dare run her in now?" he asked; "she's awfully down by the head; I'll bet, if they try it, they'll swamp her."

Lincoln shrugged his shoulders. "Guess they'll take a chance," he answered; "they've got to. All their stuff must be ashore. If they don't land and stand us off somehow till dark, they're goners. They'll try it sure."

Dick's gaze never wavered from the fleeing

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launch. "If they upset in the channel," he said, "their fire arms are going to get wet; and then we'll have 'em."

"No, we won't," Murray objected; "they must have more in the house. And from land they could pot us, easy, and we could n't hit a balloon, shooting from the dory, in this sea. I believe they've got the best end of it, now."

"We'll know, mighty soon," said Harris grimly: "they're not far from the harbor now."

He spoke the truth. And a moment later it became evident that they were going to make the attempt. Straight for the entrance they held her — one breathless instant of suspense, while their pursuers waited for some giant wave to overwhelm them — and the danger was past. The passage was safely accomplished, and the launch swept around the bend of the cove and was lost to sight.

Lincoln turned to Harris. "Well," he said, "they've made it. What now?"

They were drawing nearer to the Island every moment, and presently, as if in answer to Lincoln's words, a puff of pale blue smoke shot upward from the rocks to the right of the

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cove and a bullet hummed over their heads. Evidently their landing was not to be encouraged.

At once Lincoln turned the dory's bow around, and stood out to sea. "They don't want no visitors," he observed; "this ain't their day home."

Dick spoke up quickly. "I don't believe they 've got rifles with them," he said; "a rifle bullet does n't sing like that, except when it's spent. They must have been in an awful hurry when they started after me. I don't believe there 's a rifle in the crowd."

"Probably not," Harris assented, "but that does n't make any difference now. In five minutes they 'll be safe in the house, and then they can lay their hands on ammunition enough to last them a month. It 's unfortunate; I wish we could have cut them off from the Island."

Dick nodded gloomily. "Yes, that was our chance," he assented; "look! there they go now."

Sure enough the four figures were walking up from the beach, the huge bulk of Big Ben looming up conspicuously in contrast with the

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others. Even at that distance they could see that one of the younger boys walked stiffly, carrying his arm in a sling.

Dick glanced away again, and the next moment Lincoln cried out, "Hullo, what's the trouble now?"

As he spoke the four figures had come abruptly to a halt, and stood gazing at the house as if astonished at something they had seen or heard. Then all at once Big Ben took a step forward, and at the same instant a puff of smoke rose from the upper window of the shanty on the left, and another from the lower window on the right.

For a moment the occupants of the dory were too amazed to speak; then Dick cried out, in uncontrollable excitement, "It's Harry; Harry's got into the house. And Jim must be there, too. They fired twice, and they were shotguns, not rifles. Did you hear the bang they made?"

Apparently, it had not taken the counterfeiters long to grasp the situation. There was a hurried parley, the four figures massed closely together, gesticulating in their excitement. They saw the old man pointing out to

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sea toward their boat, and then saw him turn toward the house again ; and the next instant he stooped, picked up a stick from the ground, and, pulling his handkerchief from his pocket, began knotting it to the stick.

Dick gave a shout of joy. "A flag of truce," he cried ; "they're going to give in."

"Are they?" cried Harris. "Look at that, will you? Look at that brute."

There was good reason for his words. As the old man stepped forward with his improvised flag upraised, Big Ben with the quickness of thought, felled him to the ground with a single blow, then turned and ran for the cove at top speed.

"The others have quit," Murray exclaimed, "and he won't stand for it. He's game, anyway."

Without speaking, they stood watching the figures grouped on the beach. One of the boys stooped over the old man's figure, and presently lifted him to his feet again, while the other, picking up the stick, planted it in the sand, and a moment later each of the three pulled a revolver from his pocket, tossed it away from him, and sat down dejectedly near the flag.

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"They've had enough," Harris cried. "We'll get the whole bunch without firing a shot. Dick, my boy, you've done well. The Government owes you something for this."

In spite of the excitement, Dick smiled. "They can go as far as they like," he answered cheerfully, "but we're not out of the woods yet. How about Big Ben?"

For answer Harris pointed to the mouth of the cove. "There he comes," he said, "but I don't know what he means to do. He can't be going to tackle the whole of us single-handed."

A moment later it became clear that Big Ben had no such intention. The instant he emerged from the entrance of the cove, he put the launch around, and bore away to the westward, skirting the shore of the Island.

"Let her go, skipper," cried Harris; "we'll get him now, for sure."

At once they started in pursuit.

"He's in bad shape," Dick observed; "the old launch is just about done for."

It was easy to see, indeed, that such was the case. She had evidently shipped considerable water already, and there had been no

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time to bail her out before Big Ben had started out again from the cove. She labored heavily, so that occasionally, as some big wave bore down upon her, Dick half doubted whether she would rise again from the hollow where she disappeared. Yet still she staggered on, and soon, rounding the point, was lost to sight. As they swept after her, they looked for a moment toward the shore, and Dick's heart leaped with gratitude at the sight which met his eyes. Harry had left the house, and was walking down toward the prisoners on the beach ; and by his side, apparently none the worse for his misadventure, strode old Jim Hutchins, his gun under his arm, his white hair streaming in the breeze.

Lincoln chuckled as he gazed. " Guess the old man will have quite a story to tell," he remarked ; " mighty glad he 's with us still, now, I can tell ye. I reckon they made up their minds he was too tough to kill."

The next moment they had rounded the corner of the Island, and Harris uttered an exclamation of annoyance as he saw that the gap between the two boats had increased rather than diminished.

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"Keep on your course," he said to Lincoln, with some irritation; "can't you see he's going a lot closer to the Island than you are."

It was true enough. A hundred yards or so from shore a sunken ledge reared itself from the sea, showing clear to the eye as the waves broke over it, and through this narrow channel Big Ben was seeking to make his way.

Yet Lincoln did not alter the dory's course a hair's breadth, and again Harris cried, even more peremptorily, "Get after him, I say! Get after him, quick!"

The skipper shook his head. "Get after him, nothing," he retorted; "that's as bad a place as there is on the shore. He's crazy to go in there; it's honeycombed with rocks. There, what did I tell you! listen to Jim!"

On the cliffs above them the whole of the party on shore had suddenly made their appearance, to view the conclusion of the chase. The Johnsons, plainly warned by Hutchins of Big Ben's danger, were shouting aloud to him, while above the clamor of wind and wave Hutchins's stentorian tones could be heard, roaring out, "Keep away! Keep her off! Head out to sea!"

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At last Big Ben appeared to hear, and heed, the warning. He cast one quick glance toward the shore, then altered his course, and the next instant, in a single breath, Murray cried, "Look at that, will you! Look at that!" And Lincoln shrieked, "He's broken his engine. My God, he's done for now!"

There seemed truth in his words. Something had gone wrong with the engine, and the counterfeiter was being borne, with appalling speed, directly toward the rocks to leeward. Once, twice, thrice, he tried frantically to crank his wheel, and then they saw him throw a desperate glance over his shoulder, where the sunken reefs, brown and bare, seemed to lie waiting for their prey.

"He's a goner, I tell you," Lincoln cried again, his face tense and drawn with the dread of what was to come; "that's where Sam Jacobs was drowned, four years ago. You can't save a man, once he gets in there; he's a goner, sure. That current runs like a mill-race."

Suddenly, as if he fully realized his peril, Big Ben abandoned his attempts to start the engine, and instead leaped for the oars. And

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then, for a moment, they saw what Lincoln had just declared to be impossible — a man, with thrice the strength of a normal man, actually holding his own against the relentless force of the gliding, whirling current. Yet it was only for a moment. Flesh and blood are only flesh and blood, — not iron or steel, — and gradually, strive as he might, he began to lose. Then, putting forth all his strength, in one last despairing effort, he lashed his oars through the water like a madman, and with the terrific strain there came a rending crash, — his starboard oar broke squarely in two, — and before he could recover himself the stern of the launch was within a dozen feet of the rocks. No one spoke, but all stood gazing, horror-stricken, at the tragedy which could have but one ending. Mercifully soon it came. The next moment the launch was tossed high in air, — hung poised for an instant, — and then with the speed of lightning crashed downward on the jagged rocks. Lost amid a shower of spray, a second later they saw her rolling bottom up, before a second wave and a third, with terrific impact, had splintered her from end to end. Once, further inshore, amid the

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floating wreckage, they seemed to see an outstretched arm against the background of the cliffs, then nothing more.

Silently Lincoln turned the dory's bow for the Island.

Half timidly, Dick laid a hand on Harris's arm. He had never seen death before. "Isn't there — something — we can do?" he faltered.

Harris shook his head. "Nothing," he answered. "He is beyond our power now."

Slowly they neared the entrance to the harbor. Dick, dazed with the suddenness of all the crowded events of the last three days, sat looking straight before him, as if in a stupor. The sun had risen high above the horizon; the sky was clearing; the gale was dying down. Far out to sea the snowy sea gulls dipped and wheeled; the fight at Sea Duck Cove was at an end.

THE END

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